



IONA

A Lay

of

Ancient Greece

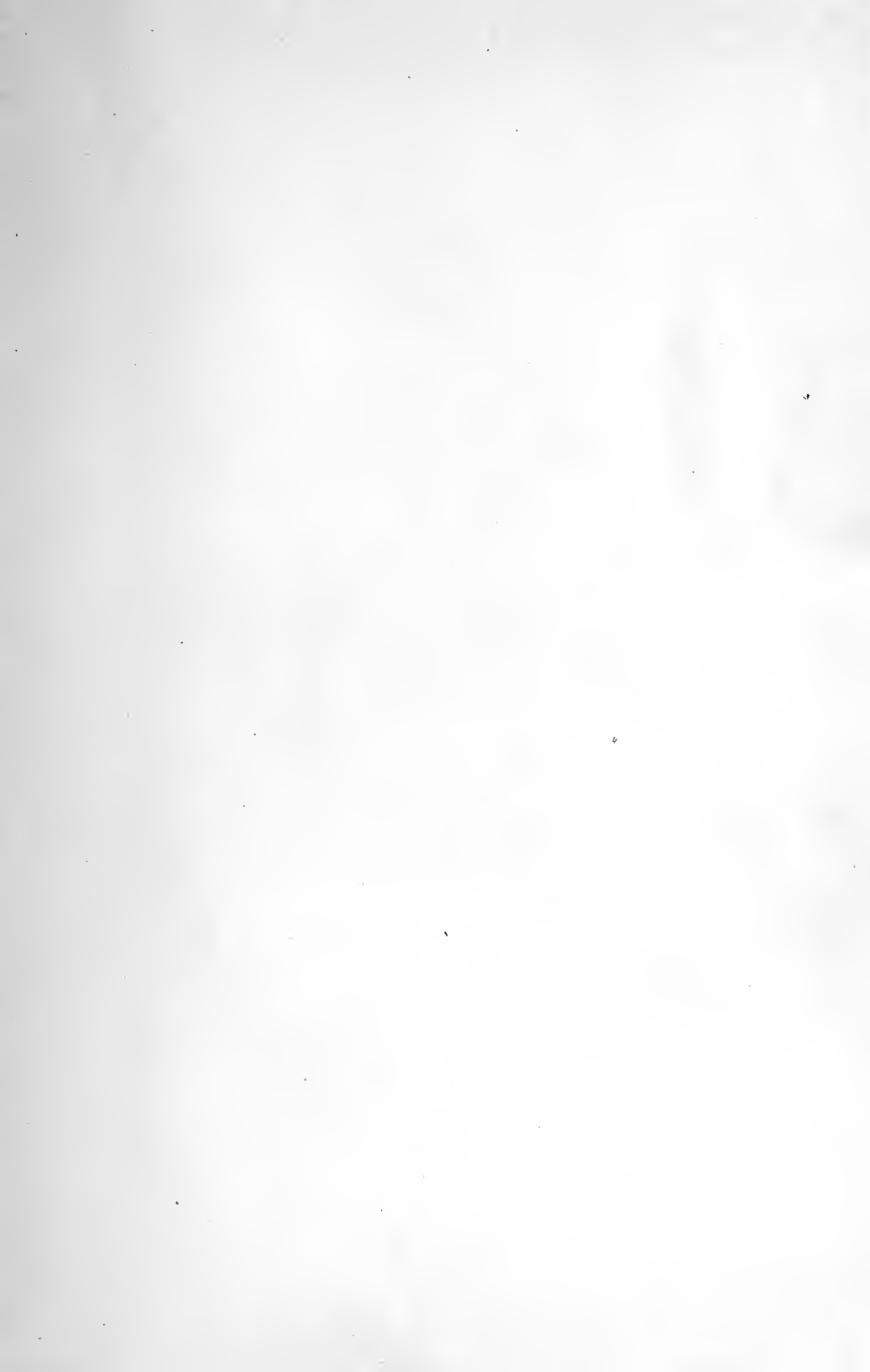
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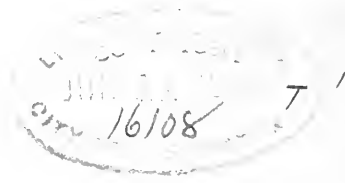


IONA

A LAY OF ANCIENT GREECE

BY
PAYNE ERSKINE

33



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PREFACE.

It has been said of late, by some with a feeling of sadness and regret, that the poetic spirit has fled ; that the poetic temperament is submerged in the hurrying flood of new ideas of progress and needs of man and is cooled in the icy stream which flows from the fountain of scientific truth ; that all mystery is of the past, and that man, having subdued the forces of nature, and made them subservient to his will, finds them no longer mysterious ; that the whitened bones in the newly opened sepulchres reveal the truth that death is the end of life, while man grows like the grass in the fields, fulfils the purposes of his existence unknown to himself, and is as surely cut down by the stroke of time, to rise no more ; that nature no longer reveals to us a hidden Creator ; and that the sighing winds, the moaning ocean, the rustling grasses, and shaking leaves, the pattering raindrops, and the babbling, restless brooks, need no longer thrill our beings with either joy or sadness, as these feelings are but sensations produced in our organic tissues, with the disintegration of which, ends all aspiration, all hope, all delight, all life ; that soul is but sense, and spirit but a figment of the imagination.

It is the aim of this book to show the desire that exists in every human being, — unaided by the teachings of Christianity, — to live

on after this life is over ; the natural out-reaching of every human spirit toward the divine, calling for eternal life. The still small voice floats upward, piercing the density of human wisdom, and is heard through all, and above all.

It has been said by philosophers, that the faculty of intuition is the highest pertaining to man, and is that alone which lifts him above the lower orders of animals, and enables him to conceive of an Infinite Being, or to become cognizant of abstract truths.

The author has endeavored in these pages to awaken and develop this supreme faculty, as well as to give pleasure through the exercise of the imagination, which is so closely allied to it ; and has placed the scenes and events of the narrative before the Christian era, in order to leave the thought unbiased by Christian teaching, admitting only the philosophy that may be gained from the works of Socrates and Plato, or by the true love of, and communion with nature ; and throughout the whole has adhered as closely as possible to the classic spirit and feeling, giving only the Greek names and significations to the deities.

THE AUTHOR.

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PRELUDE.



CHARACTERS INTRODUCED.

IRIS, the messenger of Hera, employed in beneficent offices toward mortals.

ZEUS, or JUPITER, the supreme deity.

HERA, or JUNO, queen of heaven, and protectress of the interests of women and of the sacredness of marriage.

ARTEMIS, or DIANA, twin sister of Apollo.

HEPHÆSTUS, or VULCAN, god of fire and of the forge.

APHRODITE, or VENUS, goddess of beauty, and wife of Hephæstus.

IONA, a Grecian princess.

DIOPHANTUS, a shipwrecked poet, saved by Iona.

HYAS, a shepherd.

LESTA, daughter of Iris and Hyas.

ILERDA, one of the maids of Iona's household.

LAESTRO, father of Ilerda.

NEARCHUS, one of Iona's counsellors.

DANAUS, suitor to Iona.

ASTICA, an old nurse in the household of Iona's mother, and favorite servant.

LEROS, a philosopher, and the tutor of Iona.

HYLAX, CÆAGRUS, and EDONUS, Iona's brothers.



IONA.

PRELUDE.

HERE, singing stream, will I repose and dream,
Here, where thy lilies wave their glory-laden heads.
The violets lift their faces from their mossy beds
To feel the sun's warm kisses and be wooed by thee.
Above thy waves doth bend the virgin yellow-bell ;
Like as a maiden hideth her heart's love, so she
Doth screen herself full modestly and well,
Drawing so close her leafy veil, that none may see,
 But only guess her loveliness.
Naught stirreth now the echoes of this ferny dell
Save thy soft murmuring voice, thou gentle rill.
Thy voice is ever wayward, sweet, and low.
Dost tell unto the bending flowers a tale of woe
To charm the glittering dew-drops to their eyes,
And make them rustle with a sad surprise?
And dost in murmurings low thy story tell,
That each fair face may bend, to hearken well,

More near unto thine own, thou dreamy rill?
My heart with joy would dance within my breast
To know the many tales which thou dost tell.
I fain would be a floweret with the rest,
And learn of thee the songs which they love best.
Can naught but flowers and fairies know thy tongue?
They, and the nymphs that sport thy waves among?
So light they dance upon thy bubbles, rill!
And they may laugh thy gentle murmuring still,
And play for aye in thy clear depths, sweet stream,
While in thy waves their shining hair doth gleam.
And they may know each word which thou dost speak,
While I, poor mortal, here upon the brink,
Can naught but sit and gaze on thee, and think,
And dream, and wonder at thy song
Which thou art singing, singing, all the glad day long.

Thus sadly sighing at my fate

I lingered still.

The flowers seemed beck'ning me to wait

Beside the rill;

White iris flowers raised slender finger tips,

And beckoned me.

Nodded the butter-cups, and down where drips

The spray from banks of moss, blue hare-bells smiled,

And nodding, beckoned me.

The reeds and water grasses rustled at my feet,
 And all the air was filled with summer odors sweet,
 All blue with opening violets, a fit retreat
 For slumbering Psyche while she slept and dreamed —
 The bank whereon I lay, aye, verily! it seemed
 That still the impress of her lovely form might be
 Traced in the bended flowers and grasses where she lay,
 Sweet-sleeping, dreaming, fairer than the risen day;
 Purer than lilies white, pearled with the morning dew —
 Till thence came softly stepping, slyly, peeping through
 The leafy screen, the little God of love, intent
 On mischief still, with arrow set, and lithe bow bent

To send the winged dart
 To any luckless heart,
 He there might chance to meet.
 When lo! this vision sweet
 Enthralled his wary feet,
 That he who sought to snare
 Others, all unaware

Himself was caught in meshes of her golden hair,
 Which robed in light her wondrous loveliness.
 Himself ensnared in that fair net, his suit to press,
 Knelt in the grasses at her side, and left a kiss
 More light than lightest zephyr's breath, on her fair cheek.

But when his love he would confess,

She wakened in affright,
And fled, a vision bright,
Faster than morning light
Flashes o'er mountain's height ;
Or ray of setting sun
When golden day is done,
From steep to steep, swift darting from our sight,
Leaves the dull earth shrouded in gloom of night.

There with the rustling of the grasses, soft and low,
And with the sound of humming birds, and buzzing bees,
And with the murmuring of waters, and the breeze
Shaking o'erhead the leaves, soft, sweet, and slow,
Came words unto mine ear, as uttered in the flow
And ripple of the wavelets on the stones below.

 Came words more sweet and tender
 Than human tongue might render,
And many tales of bygone days
When Dian walked her wooded ways
 In all her queenly splendor,
While maidens lithe and slender,
With maiden grace attend her,
 Leading with leash of silver cord
 Her hounds, all ready at her word
To bound away through forest glade,
And start the deer from covert shade,

Or send the timid hare swift panting to his lair.

So heard I how, at close of day,

Persephone, — along the way

Where slips the stream 'twixt banks of moss, —

Came down, the flowering fields across,

With light, free step, and joyous, lissome grace.

Lingered the sun's last rays, to touch her face

With rosy kisses, thus to woo no more

That lovely vision by the wooded shore.

Wild flowers, of odors faint and sweet, she wore

Bound in the braids of her smooth, silken hair,

Darker than shadows of the night. More fair

Was she, than any flower which she might wear ;

Unconscious of her own bright loveliness,

As birds in air of their own joyousness,

While on untrammelled wing they sing and soar.

She moved along where slow waves creep,

And silent, snowy lilies sleep,

To pluck of them, while one fair hand

Held her light robe from wave and sand.

She seemed afar, a faint, white gleam

On the dark bosom of the stream,

Until she turned, and sought once more

For flowers along the reedy shore,

Holding her light robe as before.

She plucked the scented iris blue,
Shaking the drops of evening dew,
And gathered flowers of every hue,
Trilling the while a blithesome song.
Beside her path-way trailed along
Bearing their lamps, the glow-worms slow,
White evening moths, a fluttering throng,
Sped round her on soft, silent wings.
All sought her to caress — all gentle things
That love the opening flowers, and night, and dew.
So strayed she on, when suddenly there grew
Before her in the way, a flower more fair,
More strange than any blossom growing there,
Whose petals opening with pale opal glow,
Seemed like a gleam of light from realms below.
In her sweet innocence she stooped, and kissed,
And plucked, and in her lovely bosom placed
The harmful thing that wrought her sudden woe,
The flower of fate, the charmed asphodel.
In that same instant all the air grew still;
The green leaves trembled, and the laughing rill
Hushed its glad song. The flowers drooped their heads
And died of grief upon their mossy beds;
While from the depths of the still stream
Rose at her side, like some ill-omened dream,

Two shadowy steeds, and in their sombre track
 A chariot ebon black,
 Wherein two beings stood, as born of shade,
 Who caught and bore away the sweet, white maid,
 Grown cold with sudden fear.

Scarce from her lips had fled the gladsome song,
 Ere she for aye was gone.

Yet still the echo of her voice is heard
 Fainter, more sweet, than any note of bird,
 Now far, now near, from towering tree to hill,
 Or hovering with the shadows round the rill.
 And still her mother's voice is heard afar
 Through woodland bowers where deepest shadows are,
 Calling and sighing, as the wind the trees among,
 "Persephone ! Persephone ! why tarriest thou so long?"

Thus from the stream whose words in ceaseless flow
 Came to mine ear, I heard of long ago
 Ere time was old. Yea, long, and long ago,
 When Gods came down, and walked the earth with men,
 And wrought with them heroic deeds, and when
 Bright nymphs, and naiads from the woods and streams,
 Met mortals in the shades, or came in dreams
 To make their slumbers glorious, and when
 Fair Goddesses from far off wondrous heights

Trailed through the air their clouds of rosy hue,
To seek the haunts of man, and shed cool dew
Upon the parchèd earth ; or speeding through
The deep, wide waste of waters dark and blue,
Their wingèd messengers they sent to guide
Midst storms and dark, lost seamen through the tide.
Thus spake the stream, — “ An hundred hundred times
Have these bright waters been caught up in clouds
And floated round the high Olympian hill
Where Gods have thrones, thence softly to distil
In silent dews, or hide with leaden shrouds
The heavy earth, or in bright showers to bring
The blessings of the Gods upon the opening spring,
Aye ! and Zeus’ anger, when he stoops to rend
With thunderbolts the earth, and downward send
Dread fear into the hearts of men.
An hundred times have these bright drops been shed
O’er fields and moors and distant woods and hills
To trickle down and run in countless rills

Back to their rocky bed,
There to sing on, and on
In never ending song,
And over yet, and over

In ceaseless rhythmic story,
 The deeds of gods and men,
Of life, and love, and glory.
 Aye ! and of waning breath,
 And sorrow lost in death."



CANTO I.



CANTO I.

THUS, in reverberating murmurs low,
The words half uttered in the rhythmic flow,
As thought were fettered in sweet sounds to earth,
And needed but the form of words to give it birth,
Came to mine ear the tale of one whose woe
Filled the drear night with weeping, long ago,
Revealed in nature's music, like the low
Vibrations of a wind-played harp whose strings
Repeat in harmonies the sighs of breathing things,
Filling the air with the soft sound of wings,
Like some faint echo from the distant star-lit spheres
Of that vast harmony which never mortal hears.

A woman sat beside a stream, and wept
In silent sorrow. Length'ning shadows crept
And wrapped her round with a soft veil of gray;
While, like a tired monarch, in the west
The sun sank slowly down to glorious rest,
Wearied with splendor, and the golden day
Fled lightly after, trailing by the way

Her tinted robes. Soon silent-footed night
With brooding wings, covered the earth from sight,
And hid the last faint smile of day with gloom.
The woman with bowed head sat weeping still,
While the night breezes at their own wild will
Tossed her dark uncoiled hair, loosed from trim bands,
And downward sweeping with a wayward grace
Hiding her face.

Down in the stream, and on her clasped hands,
Bright tear-drops fell in silence ; and her eyes
Burned dimly with the hidden fire that lies
Deep in the soul, that findeth no relief
From its dull burning, is not quenched with tears
But smould'reth ever in the souls that love.
Thus, through slow creeping hours, devoid of fears, —
For those who grieve fear not, so they may weep, —
She sat as carved in stone ; till wild above
Her head, unsheltered, with resistless sweep,
Broke in fierce tumult, high twixt earth and heaven
With heavy thunder loud, a storm-cloud, driven
By rushing angry winds, Zeus' mighty breath ;
Thus rudely waking the calm slumbering night
With fiery darts, and shafts of vengeful light
Mid darkness blacker than the vaults of death.
Then she arose, lifting her wan, cold face
Toward the high heavens, as if she there would trace

The sorrow of her inmost soul with fire
 Drawn from the elements; her bare white arms
 Outstretched, as if with magic art and charm
 She would lure on the spirit of the storm
 To never-ceasing fury, while she cried
 "Ah! woe is me! Oh! heaviness of woe!
 Grief smiteth me, nor know I whence to go.
 How is my life consumed! Would I had died
 While yet I dreamed. Now am I hither borne
 Upon a sea of mine own tears, and shorn

Of all save life. My own glad heart I gave,
 All that I am, all I might ever be,
 To one who turned away. Yea! shriek and rave,
 Ye wild winds through the earth. Spare not, nor save.
 Tear up the forest trees, and drop them in the sea,
 And yet thou canst not rave as doth my heart in me.

Oh! cover me, ye heavy clouds,
 And wrap me round with your cold circling breath;
 Darkness on darkness piled, or shrouds on shrouds
 To hide my grief. Oh! desolate as death!

Iona crieth; — Hear!

Arise, ye Storm-Gods, spirits of Zeus' wrath,
 And send on Diophantus whom I loved
 Your heaviest floods.

And say to him, 'Behold the grief she hath,
Whose love was thine!' and cry, 'Were these drops tears
Shed from her eyes,
Her weeping could they compass not; her sighs
Are wafted with the breath of dying flowers
To Hera's throne.'
Hear! thou great queen of heaven! from thy fair skies
Look down on me, and grant me strength to hate
As thou canst hate:
For yet within my soul where opened late
Fair blossoms of his love, a tender thought
Lingereth, and calleth, that I have no rest,
But still would fain
Reach out mine arms and call him back who wrought
My heavy sorrow and my bitter pain,
Who taught me love, and wakened my still soul
From slumbering peace. Now as a hidden mole
That gnaweth in the dark, within me lies
Remembrance of him, and of those past hours.
Hence would I gather up the last few flowers
Of my dead love, trample them in the dust
And leave the thorns wherewith they grew, to thrust
And goad my laden spirit on to vengeance."

Then with impetuous grief wasted and spent,
 She drooped like some sad flower that lacks the sun ;
 Nor lifted up her voice, nor wept, nor sent
 Her silent prayers toward Heaven, winged with sighs,
 But like despair enthroned in darkness sat, as one
 Within whose bosom even sorrow dies.
 So through the night, while still the heavy air
 Echoed with sound of warring elements,
 Wild beasts crept forth from hidden cave and lair,
 Yet turned from that charmed spot,
 And harmed the woman not,
 But blended their fierce cries
 With Nature's harmonies,
 Lured by the wildness, to their own wild nature kin.
 Thus to orchestral music, awful, vast,
 Yet ever full, harmonious and deep,
 Whether the note be faintest echo cast
 Upon the air, an infant's sigh in sleep,
 Or whether mountains tremble, and the sea
 Revolts that it hath bounds, still to the key
 Of one majestic thought doth nature move,
 In numbers rhythmical, sublime ;
 Touched by the hand of the Divine
 Are all her instruments,
 Her wild, discordant elements

Attuned and measured to the chord of love.

Yea! Ever the immortal symphony rolls on.

Thus sang the streamlet in its ceaseless song.

“Nay, sing again of earth, sweet singing stream;
In wandering, thou hast wandered from the theme
Wherein with pity thou hast stirred my soul;
Tell of the woman, I would know the whole
Of her sad story; pray thee, brought the morn
No ray of gladness to her soul forlorn?”

But though in haste I importuned, the stream must needs
In its own way, slow slipping through the reeds
And over mossy stones, reveal the wrong

Iona wept.

So sped the hours along,
A silent, fleeting throng;
The sullen clouds passed by,
And all the eastern sky
Flushed with the smile of day.
In glorious, bright array,
The glad earth waked to greet the sun,
Smiling through tears, like jewels hung
On every shaking spray,
On every nodding flower
That bloomed in leafy bower,

Or decked the woodland path,
 As Zeus the arrows of his wrath,
 In pity, turned to sparkling gems
 That in the sun would melt, and run
 Down all the quivering stems
 Of nature's growing things,
 Renewing life, and filling stream and springs
 With joyous overflow.
 Then, as if all earth's gladness
 Smote on her heart, and woke again her sadness,
 Iona rose, and lifting up her eyes,
 Looked on the roseate skies,
 Looked on the swaying trees,
 And felt the merry breeze
 Kiss her pale cheek, as fleet
 It passed her by.
 Looked on the opening flowers
 And felt beneath her feet
 The growing grass.
 Almost she smiled,
 Yet drew her breath in with a tremulous sigh,
 As might a child
 Who hath been frightened in its sleep,
 And opens wide its eyes, and fain would weep,
 Although its terror is no longer nigh.

Then spake she, "To what place
Have now my heedless feet conveyed
My heavy weighted heart? Upon my face
I feel the warm, soft breath of winds of June;
I hear the sound of many buzzing wings
Like music played
By spirit-hands on silver gossamer strings,
And every flower-bell rings
A sweet sound forth; in merry tune
Sing many merry birds.
Roaming the low, green hills, I see the herds
Of fair Artemis' dappled deer
Tempting the huntress forth with hound and horn.
Are these the fields Elysian? Is Iona born
Into the land of spirits blest?
Or doth she dream?
If this be dreaming, may I never wake,
Never return to that dull prison of my soul,
Which I with tears flung by, a worthless thing.
Thus let me ever dream, for the dear sake
Of him I loved, and let me deem him true;
Or if I dream not, may the healing dew
Of blest forgetfulness unto my spirit bring
Sweet peace; for surely this is that fair vale
Where sinless mortals find release
From sorrow, and weep not."

Thus speaking she moved on a little space
 As one who walketh in a trance ;
 Her tearful up-turned face
 Alight with inward radiance,
 As troubled waters on a moonlit eve,
 Reflect a splendor more than they receive.
 Then as her wet and clinging robe restrained
 Her eager feet, she with swift downward glance
 Its blackness did perceive,
 Her sandals worn and stained
 With weary journeyings,
 And knew her grief remained.
 Herself the one dark blot
 In that bright sunlit spot,
 She lifted up her arms toward heaven and cried
 In bitterness,
 “Ye Gods ! Why mock ye me?
 Have ye no shadows deep enough, to hide
 Iona and her griefs?”
 Then fell upon the earth, and lay as she had died.
 There, out and in, and in and out,
 Sunlight and shadows danced about
 Over her heavy, sombre robe,
 Like death and pleasure

In mystic measure,
Dancing forever
On this strange globe.

While thus the stream its story was pursuing,
The words were lost unto my mortal sense ;
Only above my head I heard the cooing
Of soft gray wood-doves, in their innocence ;
Yet never ceased the stream its gentle singing,
And still I listened on with half shut eyes,
While from the far shore came the high shrill ringing
Of katydids, and wayward wind-blown sighs
Among the reeds and grasses passed me by,
Until again in words the tale renewing,
I heard how, as Iona thus did lie
Like one who hath repose past all undoing,
A maid ethereal as the mists of morning,
A maiden beautiful beyond adorning
Rose from the stream, and moved to where she lay ;
Then kneeling at her side, shook from the tips
Of her white fingers, cool, refreshing spray ;
And bending over her, touched her pale lips,
And in a voice like murmuring waters said
 “ Iona, rise ; lift up thy head
 And tell to me thy woe.

Last evening when the sun was low,
 I wandered through the meadows,
 And saw thee moving, bowed and slow,
 Among the deepest shadows.
 Iona rise, lift up thy head !
 Last night upon my quiet bed,
 I felt thy warm tears falling,
 I heard thy sighs, thy calling,
 And knew a mortal wept
 Above me, while I slept."

Then did Iona rise, and fix her weary eyes
 Upon the maid, and shivering like a leaf
 That feels a sudden breeze, thus spake :
 "Who art thou? Why dost bid me wake?
 My spirit walketh as in death,
 And fain would I deny my body breath,
 That these mine eyes, on beauty such as thine
 Might never look ; even wert thou Divine,
 My heart unto my heart would say,
 I love thee not, would that thou wert away."
 Then said the maiden, "Nay, thou wrongest me.
 My name is Lesta, and I come to thee
 In sadness for thy sorrow ;
 Bide with me till the morrow,

And tell me why thou weapest,
And nightly vigil keepest.

Here by the margin of this stream,
Have I a couch of softest down,

Where thou mayest lie, and rest, and dream,
Beneath yon mossy bank,

Within a grotto cool, and clear,
Where neither heat, nor vapors dank,
Nor any noisome things appear,
Nor troublous noises greet thine ear.

I will restore thy fainting soul
With wine of lilies mine own hands have made;
And why thou grievest, all thy dole
And woe, thou shalt reveal to me.

Perchance within my grasp, I have the key
Wherewith to unlock treasures of delight,
And bring thee joys that shall dispel thy night
Of sorrow, and bring back thy smile.

Iona, bide with me a while."

Then reaching out her arm, Iona's hand
She took within her own, and from her eyes
Shed such soft radiant beams, as would beguile
Even dumb animals to love, and rise,

And follow her.

But her sweet, gentle pleading,

Iona heard unheeding,
 Yet followed at her leading
 Through utter weariness.
 Unwilling, unresisting,
 With lingering step, nor listening
 Nor hoping for redress.

Thus Lesta led her on, through sun and shade,
 Beside the margin of the stream, and made
 The woodland path all glorious with the light
 That circled her, — her garments glistening bright
 With gems, like myriad water drops, each one
 Reflecting fairy hues, a mimic sun, —
 Until she came to that same mossy mound
 Where through the night Iona weeping sat.
 Then turned, and took a narrow path that wound
 About the low green hillock to the stream.
 Where'er the maiden's light foot left the ground
 Flowers grew, each one encircled by a beam
 Of rosy light, and spangled bright with dew.
 Yet these Iona saw not, neither knew
 Whither the maiden led her, till she stood
 Upon the water's edge. Then with a smile
 More sorrowful than tears, she turned her head
 And looked at Lesta, — beauteous, without guile
 And lovely as a rose-hued, morning cloud, —

And said, —

“Hast thou then waked me from that sleep
Which leads to death, that these bright waves may keep
My sorrow for me, and may be my shroud?
Surely thou seemest kind even though fair.
My laden soul would seek the silence deep,
That cometh with oblivion dark and drear,

Lead on, I have no fear.”

But Lesta answered — “Nay, only for rest,
And for thy soul’s refreshment enter here.”
Then with a sudden motion swift and strong,
She swept aside the willows lithe and long,
That hid the entrance to Artemis’ halls,

And led unto her bower,

And through an archway curiously wrought
She led Iona down broad steps of stone
Into a chamber beautiful and vast,
A many pillared room, wherein was caught
And multiplied each beam of light that shone
Within. Yet here they loitered not, but passed
Through many chambers, each than was the last,

More beautiful.

In some were tables, laden with repast
Of choicest viands, temptingly displayed,
In others many a soft couch was laid,

Luxurious and enticing to repose.
 In these the light was tempered soft and gray,
 As when the day was drawing to its close ;
 And every lightest footfall on the marble floor,
 Made musical vibrations through the air ;
 And every sound of voice, or whispered word,
 From room to room re-echoed evermore,
 In soft melodious measure, never heard
 By waking mortals, like unto a dream
 Of music, wafted from a distant shore,
 Wayward and sweet, as never human hand
 Might draw from human instrument in any land,
 Voiceless and faint, yet filling every sense,
 And leading to repose, and self-forgetful rest.
 Yet neither here did Lesta pause, but led her hence
 Into another chamber, cool and small,
 With low, arched roof, where sounds of waterfall,
 And gentle pattering of soft summer rain
 Among the leaves, and clamorous noise of brooks,
 Blended in soothing harmony of liquid notes,
 While past the amber walls, and crystal roof,
 The silver stream was flowing. Warp and woof
 Of golden sunbeams softly filtered through
 The restless waves, and danced upon the floor
 With rushes strewn ; while odors faint and rare,

Filled with a dream of flowers the quiet air, —
Of water lilies sleeping in the sun,
Of stately iris flowers that one by one,
Lift their fair heads, and smile, and pass away.
Here she remained, and bade Iona rest
Upon a couch with down of thistles dressed;
And brought fresh fruits, and amber wine of flowers,

Her hands had pressed.

From lilies pale, of healing powers

And many virtues rare,

And bade her taste;

And brought her silken robes,

And bade her haste

And put away

The sombre dress that shadowed forth her grief.

Then said Iona, "Stay!

Because I had no heart to tell thee nay,

Have I thus followed thee,

Not that I hoped for aught.

I tell thee that for me

Joy may not be.

The tears that I have wept, would fill my grave.

What is there now in life that I would save?

Only the tempest, that within me cries

For vengeance. All else dies

Before the famine in my soul.
 If thou with thy fair promises couldst give
 One ray of hope that I might reach my goal
 And be revenged, then would I breathe and live ;
 Then wear these shining robes, and plead with thee
 To teach me smiles and ways to charm the heart ;
 Then would I sue the sun to shine on me,
 And kiss my cheek to redness, and would part
 With these black robes of sorrow. Yea ! with art
 Would I conceal my pain, and call upon the stream
 To teach me laughter, and the merry beam
 Each firefly carries 'neath its wing
 To light the dusky eve, within these eyes
 Whose brightness hath long since been washed away
 With tears, should shine with living light,
 If I might call Diophantus back and lay
 On him this burden I have borne ; the slight
 That he hath put upon me, and the scorn
 And obloquy ; if he might feel the thorn
 That pricks within my soul ;
 If I might see him, covered with contempt,
 Lie in the dust, and drain the bitter bowl
 His hand hath filled for me, then would I wait,
 Nor seek for greater happiness than this.
 For who love deepest, can most deeply hate."

Then Lesta spake again in gentle wise,
"Nay! nay! Iona, thou art wild with grief,
And spent with weariness. Thy tears and sighs
Avail thee naught, for sorrow is a thief
That steals away the flowers of youth, ere time
With swiftest stroke is ready for their fall.
Patience! Iona, thou canst compass all
With patience. He who cannot run may climb,
And soonest reach the mountain's height;
While he who hastens, wearied, lags behind.

I must away, this is the hour
Artemis comes, in queenly power,
With all her nymphs, and dryads bright,
With many a stag, and many a hind,
To bathe, and rest, till set of sun.
Her must I serve. When day is done
I will return. Then rest thee here,
Refresh thyself with food, and let the cheer
That cometh with sweet slumber light thine eyes,
To greet me when I come again."
She vanished while she spake, nor did Iona rise
To follow her for lack of strength, but when
The last faint echo of her footsteps died
Away in music on the marble floor
Without her bower, Iona spake once more:

"The maiden sayeth truly. Wise and kind
Is she, and I will heed her words, for blind
With sorrow, I unto the Gods have prayed
To be revenged, yet have I sought for death.
Oh! woman that I am! my feeble breath
To spend in unavailing sighs; afraid
To meet my people's pity, and their scorn.

What! shall I weep and die?

Is this the fate whereunto I was born —

To love, and like a worm to lie

In dust beneath Diophantus' heel

Because I loved him? I will live,

Yea! eat, and drink, and breathe, that he may feel

The strength that lieth in a woman wronged."

Then to the feast she turned, and ate and drank,

The fruit and wine. Her tired body longed

For rest, and on the fragrant couch she sank

Into a slumber, calm, and deep.

All through the day,

In quiet, restful sleep, Iona lay,

And Lesta in the evening found her there

Still sweetly sleeping, all her ebon hair

Thrown back a tangled mass, her white throat bare,

Her bosom heaving with her gentle breathing.

And Lesta looked and smiled,

And spake in accents tender,
 "Sleep on, thou sorrow's child.
I fear the help I render
Will only lead thee deeper
In woe, unconscious sleeper.
 Why with untamed will
 Dost strive for vengeance still?
 Revenge is not so sweet
 As thou, with eager feet
 Still pressing to thy goal,
 Dost think, unwitting soul."

As one who feels in sleep the presence at his side
Of one who thinks on him, Iona opened wide
Her eyes, and looked in Lesta's face; then sighed,
And raised herself up on the couch, and said,
"I have been far, far hence, midst pleasures fled,
And joys long past. I fear me, I have overslept
The hour thou bad'st me waken. Have the shadows crept
Long through the woodland? Hides Apollo's car
Beneath the western seas? My way lies far
From here. I must depart. Lesta, farewell.

And for the kindness thou hast shown
Unto a stranger, weary, and alone,
I, though a princess, can but give a beggar's thanks."
But Lesta answered, speaking quickly, — "Nay!
Thou shalt remain with me. Iona, stay.

I pray thee stay, for thou hast much to tell.

I have a willing ear.

Why say farewell?

Thou shalt have naught to fear,

And much to comfort thee.

Whence comest thou? and whither dost thou flee?

Whom dost thou love, and yet dost seem to hate?

This Diophantus,—powerful and great

Is he, or of a meaner sort?"

While thus she spake

Iona turned on her with startled glance,

And with the shake

Of anger in her voice, cried, "Silence! Maid!

I will no more of this.

Must my poor heart be laid

All bare for thy inspection? Must thy curious eyes

Search every corner? startle with surprise

Each hidden secret forth to cry 'For shame!'"

But Lesta, all unmoved, and with the same

Mild, serious look on her sweet restful face,

Made soothing answer, "Peace! Iona, peace!

I ask not to torment thee. Know'st thou not

The wise physician needs must know the spot

Most deeply hurt, must know the cause

For which his patient suffers, or he cannot heal?"

Iona, her impetuous nature quick to feel

Repentance, as to rise in anger, spake again :
“Forgive. The tongue that speaketh for a broken heart
Must needs say bitter things. I would the smart
Might pass with bitter words. Yet know thou still
The wise physician doth not tear afresh
The wounds that he would heal. For good or ill
I know not, care not which (so that the task
I have to do be done), I must depart.”
But Lesta still besought her, — “If I ask
Too much of thee that thou shouldst tell the cause
Of thy deep sorrow, then I pray thee pause
And hear my tale ; for when thy tears shall fall
In sorrow for another’s woe, thine own
Will be less heavy, and the blackening pall
’That hangeth over thee will pass away,
And let into thy soul the light of day.”
Iona thus constrained, again turned back
And sat at Lesta’s side, her heavy robe of black
Close folded round her, and her hollow eyes
Fixed with attentive look, in still surprise,
On Lesta’s face ; her features marble cold,
Her clasped hands fallen in her lap, while Lesta told
Her story, and the shadowed night
Closed round them while she spake.

CANTO II.

CANTO II.

LESTA'S STORY.

“My mother Iris, fair to look upon,
From her high place in heaven by Hera's throne,
Came down to earth one golden, summer morn,
And wandered through a hill-girt, fertile vale,
 Most beautiful and green ;
Ere heaven's watchful starry eyes grew pale,
Or in the east Apollo's car was seen,
While shepherd lads still slept beside their flocks,
 And the quick, timid hare
 All undisturbed by fear
Ate of the leaves that grew among the rocks,
 Or sported with her young,
 While every song-bird sung
A hymn of praise, to greet the God of day.
My mother Iris wandered on her way,
Until she stood beside a sparkling spring,
 So pure, and crystal clear,
 The very stones seemed near,

That lay far down upon its sandy floor ;
While every lovely form of growing thing,
Each creeping tendril, and each drooping flower, —
Which Gæa, Mother Earth, doth love withal
To wear upon her bosom, — fair and tall
Or lowly creeping over broken rocks, grew there
Making a brodered garment, many hued and rare.
With wandering wearied, my fair mother stayed
To rest her there, her lovely form arrayed
In iridescent robes of morning mist,
Made glorious, where the light of morn had kissed
Their edges into folds of shimmering gold,
And on the mossy bank lay down and slept,
By drooping willows sheltered from the glare
Of day ; when suddenly within their shade,

A wondering shepherd stept,
Of manly beauty rare,

Who, bearing in his hand his shepherd's staff,
Clad in the skins of wolves his hands had slain
To save his tender flock, had come to quaff
The waters of the spring. Entranced, he stood ;
Remain, he dared not ; yet his willing heart

As with a chain

Held him fast fettered there ;
A moment awed, and dazed, he thought himself

Still with his flocks asleep upon a bare
Hillside, and this a vision of his dreams ;

Yet never elf,

Nor sprite, in nightly vision seemed
One-half so fair.

‘ Surely,’ he thought, ‘ this wond’rous being bright,
Hath been borne hither on the wings of night,
From some celestial land to mortal sight
Forbidden. See ! the trembling flowers bend near
To feel her light breath sway them to and fro.
The harebells kiss her feet ;— would I might so,

Yet much I fear,

If I but stoop to touch her shining robe

With these rude lips,

I waken her. How dare I linger here ?

Dull sleeper on the hills ! Tender of flocks !

Shepherd of low estate ! I will away,

Nor longer stay,

With bold admiring eyes thus to profane

Her sacred presence.’ Thus he spake ; yet fain

Was he to loiter, as with backward glance

He slowly passed beneath the willowy screen

That hid her from his sight. Then in a trance

Of wonderment and rapture, he a space

Withdrew, nor ever turned his face,

Nor looked away
From gazing on the bower wherein she lay.
His flocks unheeded, wandered where they list,
Or strayed where dangers lurked. The young lambs missed
Their gentle leader, and with piteous bleat
Awoke the sleeping hills, while at his feet
His staff lay idle, and the hollow reed
Whereon it was his wont to blow sweet strains
In joyous measure, answered only sighs
To his soft breathing. To the noisy cranes
Taking their airy flight across the skies,

He lifted not his eyes,
Nor ever took them from the bower, to note
Whether their flying boded good or ill.
The hours sped on while thus he watched, until
The level sunbeams smote the western hill
Veiling in shadows long the quiet dale.

Then taking up his staff he rose ;

His tall form dark

Against the glowing western skies,
Stood forth in strength, stalwart and beautiful ;
While on the bower entranced, still gazed his eyes,
As they perceived the vision hid within.

‘How if the being bright hath fled
Whither she came,’ he said,

'By mortal sight unseen?
 I will betake me thither, if perchance
 She sleepeth still,
 For one more stolen, fleeting glance
 To hush my heart withal;
 For such fierce clamor is at war with peace;
 Or, if she waketh, to her will
 I will submit myself. Fair Greece
 Hath lost her loveliness, and every hill
 That once was crowned with glory, seemeth dull
 Since my awakened eyes have looked on her,
 So wondrous fair.
 Hence, death at her command were sweet,
 And life without her, death.'

 The air
 Stirred softly, and the sun still shone
 Upon the western hills, when Iris woke,
 And leaning over the green bank whereon
 She rested, looked into the spring, and spake
 In gentle accents, soft as dropping rain,
 'Ah! how refreshing sweet hath been my rest!
 How pure and clear these waters! Of the best
 That cometh unto mortals, I would fain
 Leave here some good and gracious boon, that all
 Who hither come unspotted, may receive
 My benison.

What holier good than love,
May Gods to man bequeath?

Hence will I weave
Around this beauteous spot, a potent spell,
That whoso looketh in this sparkling well,
Loving, unloved, and sees therein the face
Of whom he loveth, mirrored fair and clear

Beside his own, the love shall trace
He seeketh, in full measure given him,
And go rejoicing; but if dim,
And fast receding doth appear

The pictured face,
Then shall he know some base
Desire lurks in his soul; or that he there
Some thought unholy harbors, which with care
He must erase,
Ere to himself he draw the joy of love.'
Then from her neck she loosed a milk-white chain

Of gleaming pearls,
And in her two hands held them clasped above
Her head, then cast them in the spring,
And leaning over, watched how ring on ring,
Concentric circles widened from their touch,
Reflecting back each to her sight,
A thousand pearls of scintillating light,

Until the surface of the spring once more
 Became a perfect mirror as before ;
 While far, far down upon its pebbled floor,
 The circlet lay, each gem as clear and pure,
 As teardrops on a maiden's eyelash seen ;
 And while she gazed upon the trembling sheen
 Of light, behold ! her own face mirrored there !
 She smiled. Who would not smile ? so exquisitely fair
 That face ; when suddenly within there shone
 Another pictured face beside her own,
 Both strong, and clear, and beaming with the light
 Love lendeth to the eyes.
 How beautiful ! how bright
 That face appeared, and yet she knew full well,
 That she must yield her to the magic spell
 She had so late pronounced.
 Trembling she rose, and turned
 To see who thus could dare
 Invade her presence. There,
 Behold ! the shepherd stood,
 Silent, with staff in hand ; for, to declare
 Why thus he stood before her, could he not ;
 Yet no heart ever sued
 More eloquently piteous and strong,
 Than through his eyes, his spoke to hers. The song

Love singeth thrilled the air, and her soul heard,
Albeit he spoke no word.

How might this be? Goddess divine, so stirred
By human presence! Love hath even power
To touch the Gods, yet reacheth creeping things.
With one fair hand she held her flowing robe
Close round her, as among its leaves a flower
Hideth, hid she, thrusting the other forth.

‘Tell me what brings
Thee here?’ she cried, as she would hold him back.
‘Who art thou? Wherefore come? Is it for lack
Of aught, thou seekest here?’

He answered only, ‘Thee.’

My mother Iris spake again, ‘No need
Hast thou to tell thy name, or of thyself.

Hyas, I know thee well.

For often when dark clouds have veiled the earth,
I’ve watched thee gently lead
Thy little lambs to shelter on these hills.

Yet, pray thee speak, and tell
How darest thou come unsought before me here?’

Love maketh bold.

He took his eyes not from her while he spake.

‘I came unto this well at dawn to drink,
And fair, behold!

I saw thee sleeping. What ! Dost think
 Fear dwelleth in that heart
 Wherein thou art?

Silent, I left thee lest my presence here
 Might rudely break thy slumbers. To draw near
 And look into those eyes
 This morn so closely veiled,
 Methinks I would have scaled

Olympus' crest, faced dangers, tortures, scorn,
 Yea ! death itself, and, worse than death,
 To be sent from thee, ne'er to see thee more.
 Behold ! I see thee now. My every breath
 Drinks in thy loveliness. My soul feedeth thereon.
 And if thou sendest me unto the farthest shore
 Of Greece, the light that from thine eyes on me hath shone
 This hour, so surely as night creepeth after day,
 Day after night, will lead me back to thee.'
 Then spake fair Iris once again.

'Hyas, the way
 From thee to me,
 Is shorter than thou thinkest. Pray,
 Knowest thou whom thou lovest? Who thou art?'

He answered, 'Nay,
 I know thee not, nor need to know.
 But that thou art, maketh the pulsing flow

Of life within my veins move on less slow
Than doth the whirlwind through the valley go
Bending all things before it down to thee;
And for myself, or who I now may be,

I know not nor can say.

I knew but yesterday.

Not hours, but years have passed away,

Since first at early dawn

So fair to look upon

I saw thee sleeping here;

And now methinks I am no more

What then I was. I stand

New made to thy command.

My heart doth bound more fierce to act thy will

Than once, to do mine own.'

My mother Iris, standing fair and still,

Like to the stately flower that bears her name,

Spake softly, 'Hyas, thou art not the same

Thou wert at break of day.

The purifying flame

Of love, God-given, hath burned into thy soul

Divinity.

Henceforth though mortal, thou art half Divine,

And I, half mortal through this love of thine,

That bindeth me to thee, as with a chain

No powers in Earth, or Heaven, may break in twain.'

Thus tasted he the ambrosia of the Gods.

The fire that never dieth filled his soul,

And thrilled him with a rapture that was pain.

The music of the spheres with thunderous roll,

Burst on his new awakened sense,

That he was fain

To bow before her to the earth, weighed down

With the immensity of joy.

He heard, he saw,

With new perception, vivid and intense,

The universe ; and stretching on before,

Unnumbered years, and, in unmeasured space,

Eternal cycles of eternal worlds.

While thus he bowed in silence awed, once more

She spake, 'Thou seest how the life before,

Un-ending, and thy youthful past, are one.

The clouds that dimmed thy mortal sight are gone.

The veil is lifted. Now, behold ! One band

Of glorious light doth hold this lower land

And that fair world from whence I came to thee,

Within its circle bright, that both are one.

The human soul

Is bound to this by tender ties, though dole

And wreck may be his share,

That he must weep and bear ;
Yet when he loveth aught that is Divine,
 With love both strong, and pure,
 And steadfast to endure,
Straight is he lifted up, and past the line
That narrowly bounds human thought, doth see
The glories, and the joys, unbounded, free,
Of that far land beyond the vale of sleep ;
 And now, behold ! thou art
 Of that, thyself a part,
As I of this, where mortals lie and weep,
And know not life, and dream that sleep is death.'
Then Hyas rose, and looked into her eyes,
His own, bright beaming with a radiant light,
Not of the earth, but brought from paradise ;
And to beseech her never from his sight
To flee, broke forth in words. — ' Fear fills my heart,
And trembling holds me, lest thou shouldst depart,
Making these glories all as naught to me.
Why look beyond, since Heaven is where thou art?
Since joy unutterable, bliss supreme
Live in my spirit when I look on thee?
 Forever would I dream
 Like this, yea, when I hear
Thy voice, so sweetly tuned to mine ear

In words most musical,
Methinks thou dost not seem
To be, but art most real.

Oh ! thou bright Goddess ! Tell me, do I wake
And look on thee in very truth ? Forsake
Not him whom thou hast made to live ;
For once I knew not joy, not knowing thee ;
Yet neither knew I sorrow. Thou dost give
Me both. Nay ! Nay ! Without thee, I live not,
But grieving, die.' She answered him, — ' Not so.
Did I not tell thee death is not ? but woe
And darkness compass mortals round

That questionings and fears
Possess them, and they know not whither leads
The waking of that sleeping ye call death ;
Hence gladness is your portion, and not tears.
Know thou, that I am thine. Look where appears
Artemis' car, riding the eastern skies.
I go, but for a time. At early dawn
I will be here to greet thee as thine own ;'
And as her words were ended, she was gone.
Then Hyas threw himself upon the earth
And wept, and said within himself, ' No more
This glorious vision. Joy is fled, and dearth
And barrenness of hope alone are mine.

A dream, a cloud, whereon the light did shine,
That seemed a golden car, yet for its freight
Was laden down with tears. Alas ! what weight
Of woe is this ! O, blessedness of hope !

O aspiration ! Thou soul of my soul !

Return ! return ! What saidest thou ? Divine ?

In truth then were I God,
Without thee would I weep and die. Such dole
Knew never God nor man.' Thus on the sod
His tears still fell. He wept as thou didst weep,
Iona, all the long night through ; nor sleep
Knew he, to bring him dreams anew,

With sweet return of joy ;
But never yet was night that knew no dawn.
With morn he rose, and lo ! a gentle fawn
Stood near the spring, and cropped the dewy grass,
While at its side there stood a shepherd lass,
Who held it with a silken tether bound ;
But when the maiden turned to look on him,
His heart leaped up, and ere he heard the sound
Of her sweet voice, he caught her in his arms
And covered her fair face with kisses swift.
The timid fawn sprang back with vague alarms,
And Hyas cried — ' Speak ! for thy voice doth lift
My soul to meet thee midway on the path

'Twixt Earth and Heaven, thou music of my dream.'

Then answered Iris,

‘ Ah ! thou foolish boy !

I see that thou hast wept. Tell me, doth joy

Bring redness of the eyes, and features pale?

Or didst thou weep and mourn,

Because I said to thee I will return?’

And Hvas answered, ‘ Mock me not, I pray.

I mourned for thee, because thou wert away,

And more, for that I feared me thou wert not,

But some bright vision that had fled for aye.

Now thou again art here,

How glorious doth appear

The perfect, new born day?

Now to each song bird's lay,

My heart right merrily

Answers in roundelay,

More joyous than their own.

Sing on ! sing on ! sing on !

Until the stars shall hear,

And take my gladsome strain to be

Part of their own vast harmony.’”

Here Lesta paused, as though the tale were done,

While in the dusky light her soft eyes shone
Like dream-stars in a mist.

Iona, gazing at her through the gloom,
Knew not if there were gleaming tears, nor wist
What sorrow trembled through the room
With Lesta's voice, but leaning toward her, kissed
The maiden's cheek. Yet was the tender act
At variance with the words she spake, "What, maid!
Dost keep me at thy side to tell me tales

Of other beings' joy?

What is thy shepherd boy,
Piping his songs of love through hills and vales,
To me? Forever in my spirit wails
A voice of woe that never will be still,
At which thy gladsome story mocks at will,
Like laughing sunbeams, dancing o'er a grave."
But Lesta answered,

"Nay; I pray thee save
Thy chiding till my story shall be done.
Hear all. Yet am I fain to loiter on,
Telling how all their happy days were spent;
Of all the words they spake; how Hyas wooed
With such a tender wooing; how he sued
And sought her love albeit he knew 'twas his,
For very joy of suing; how they made

Their home beside the spring, beneath the shade
 Of drooping willows, and what perfect bliss
 The flying hours brought to them as they passed ;
 How Hyas gathered in once more his flock,
 And tended them with joy, while to unlock
 The prisoned echoes of the hills, his reed
 He blew, and set them wandering to the lead
 Of his blithe, dancing measures, telling forth
 His secret to the winds. From south to north,
 Through hills and vales, the wingèd notes flew wild,
 Bearing with joy to every listening child,
 Or man, or maid, or merry singing bird,
 Yea, every soul or beating heart that heard,
 This burden sweet: 'The joy! the joy of love!

And oh! the joy of love!'

That all on earth or in the sky above
 Knew that sweet cry within them, yet knew not

From whence to them it came.

Thus passed in merry round, each day the same,
 Yet new, with gladness of its own. At last
 In Hyas' arms there lay a little child,
 Pure as a white flower brought them from the skies,
 Who looked into the father's eyes and smiled
 A strange and happy smile, as if she bore
 A gladness in her spirit, from some shore

Unknown to man. Then was his joy complete.

He who hath never known

The sound of childish feet

Pattering beside his own,

Nor held within his arm

Secure from hurt, or harm,

A child, nor felt the charm

That lingereth with the touch of baby hands,

Knows not the round, completest, full delight

To man bequeathed. He stands

Apart, and by himself alone,

Because he hath no lot nor share

In that deep feeling which makes all men one,

From humblest peasant, slave or serf,

To king upon his throne.

While thus on earth, in joy and sweet content

Iris and Hyas dwelt, and ever spent

The days in bringing gladness each to each,

The child increased in loveliness, and grew

Each day more fair, till every wind that blew

Told of her beauty to the swaying trees.

The willow bending low beside their door

In tremulous sighs made answer to the breeze,

‘Most wondrous fair.’ The wingèd Hours that flew

In swiftest haste, took up the words anew

And whispered to each other as they passed,
 'Yea! fair, most passing fair, beyond the ken
 Of Gods or men.'

 The merry birds at last
 Took up the strain, and sang so loud and clear
 That Hera on her throne stooped low to hear
 Their song, 'Behold! how fair
 How wondrous, passing fair!

 Beyond the ken of Gods or men.'

Then Hera, frowning, turned to Zeus, her Lord,
 And cried,—'Hear'st thou these words? know'st aught of this?'
 He answered, 'Nay, not more than thou, I wis.'

 And looking on her, smiled.

Then was she angered, 'I will see the child.'
 And straight she called the Hours, and asked, 'These words,
 Declare whence come they? even singing birds

 Cry out in song, "How fair."'

Then spake the Hours, 'We have been everywhere
 On earth, and throughout all thy vast domain,
 But one we saw who might with thee compare,
 And she, O Queen! was but a little child—

 But fair, most wondrous fair,

 Beyond the ken of Gods or men.'

Then was the Queen for this more wroth, and cried,
 'Go back, and find for me where doth abide

This wonder ;' but they answered, ' 'Tis decreed,
O Queen ! that wheresoe'er on earth we speed,
We must with haste away, nor ever pause,
Nor ever may return. These are the laws
Eternal, fixed, O Queen ! by Zeus thy Lord.'
To her attendant throng then spake she : —

‘ Rest

Ye not. Call Iris hither. I will send
Her forth to seek the maid. . To my behest
With haste attend.'

While thus bright Hera, queen of Heaven, frowned,
And bent her angry brows on all around,
In joyous innocence, the little maid
Beside the spring with merry laughter played,
Or looked within, to see the shining pearls
That lay, a glistening circlet in the sand ;
Or in the stream that wound through meadow land,
Twixt green banks starred with golden buttercups,
Pattered bare feet, nor knew that she was fair—
A white flower, rosy hearted, and most rare,

And fair to see ;

Since she had never looked on frowns or tears,
Nor seen the human face with anxious fears,
Or passions fierce of hate or malice cold,
To ugliness distorted from that mould

Which fashioned it Divine ;
Nor looked upon a face less beautiful
Than her fair mother's ; nor had ever known
A glance less full of tenderness, and love,
Than Hyas' when he looked in Iris' eyes,
Or in her own ;
Nor heard a sound more woeful, than the sighs
That shivered through the willow at their door,
When night winds blew.

The merry birds that soar,
The fresh flowers in the dew,
The frisking lambs, and even creeping things
Among the grass, the drowsy buzzing bees,
And butterflies on dancing, golden wings,
Yea, every creature loved the little maid.
The bright waves of the stream round her small feet,
Curling and lingering, kissed her ankles bare,
Then over mossy stones, with laughter sweet
Forever babbling 'Fair! most wondrous fair!'
They hasted to the sea, and hid themselves
Within the bosom of the ocean deep,
And told their secret there.

“Far down beneath the ocean wave,
Within a shaded crystal cave,
Fair Aphrodite lay.

And near her wrought Hephæstus, — slave
Unto great Zeus, yet God,—with mighty stroke
Shaking the many caverns of the deep
With thunderous noise ; while ever as he wrought,
He looked on Aphrodite, as asleep
She lay, tranquil, and beautiful, nor woke
Nor even moved the fringed lids

That hid from him her eyes
When with loud ringing clamor,
He swung his mighty hammer,
And fashioned bolts for Zeus to cleave the skies.

Ah ! happy was her dreaming.
The merry firelight streaming,
Revealed her sweet lips smiling,
Hephæstus' heart beguiling ;
While from his anvil glowing
The ruddy light was flowing,
And all the crystal-hearted cave,
Reflected lights of ruby hue,
And gleaming gold, and ocean's blue,

Beneath the ocean wave :
While ever as his hammer flew,
With steady stroke both strong, and true,
The glancing sparks sprang forth anew,
Like showers of meteors in the sky,

Or sprites, brought forth to flash and die.
 His shaggy face, and deep-set eye
 Upon his labor bent
 With earnest look intent ;

And ever and anon, a glance
 Of tenderness, yet half askance,
 He stole at his fair, heavenly bride ;
 Who, in a deep, receding arch,
 Upon a crimson, silken couch,
 Lay dreaming, smiling. Once she sighed,
 And suddenly a little frown

Stole o'er her face and drove away the smile,
 Hephæstus' eyes still watching her the while.
 Her silken hair unto her feet swept down
 And hid her like a curtain of bright gold,
 Rippling and shining, all her lovely mould

 In mystery concealing,
 But one white arm revealing,
 And half her face.

Hephæstus saw the fleeting frown
 Her smile displace,
 And straight he flung his hammer down
 And at her side spake tenderly,

 'What aileth thee ?

Sweet one, dream of my heart, tell me what dream

Troublous and fretting in thy sleep doth seem
Reality?'

She woke, half rose, and half reclining, spake
With glance both timid and imperious, 'Shake
The dust and ashes from thy beard and hair,
Hephæstus mine; look thou, how dost thou dare

• Come hither in such plight?

Thou heavy, toilsome wight!

Now if thou lovest me,

Why work so long and late?

Here take thy place beside me and remain.

Great Zeus on thee must wait,

Nor ask too large a gain

From thy laborious hand.'

But even while she spake, the frown returned,
And thrusting forth her hand, as if she spurned
With petulant gesture some distasteful thought,
Cried, 'Still that silly whisper in mine ear!

Hephæstus, stoop to me, put thy face near

To mine, now tell me, dost in murmurs, hear
Aught spoken, or a lightly whispered word?'

He answered, 'Nay, sweet wife, I only heard
The music of thy breathing. Sleep once more.

Thou art half dreaming still, and I will wake
Such clamorous noises, as shall cowering make

Thy troublous voices seek the farthest shore
 Of Styx.' 'Nay! nay! Hephæstus. Thou art dull—
 'Tis not the sound that frets me, but the words
 Whereof the meaning maketh my heart sick.
 'Tis like the merry songs of numerous birds
 Heard from afar, or as the air were thick
 With buzzing, gauzy wings, the babbling noise
 Of running brooks, or of the wandering breeze
 Sighing through willow trees,
 Or shaking aspen leaves.
 Far through the ocean wave
 These sounds are borne
 And in this hollow cave
 Blended in one;
 And still the burden that they bear
 Comes to me, "Fair! most wondrous fair!
 Beyond the ken of Gods or men."
 Hephæstus, what doth mean
 These words?' Then with huge laughter answered he.
 "Now wherefore frown, when all are praising thee?
 When voiceful Nature and the listening Air
 When Earth and Heaven, give incense sweet and rare,
 When all mankind, with homage due and prayer
 Bow down before thee, owning thee most fair?"
 'Nay! nay!' she cried. "'Tis not of me they speak.

Am I not known? Did not I hither bear
 The gold-ripe fruit of those far gardens where
 Hesperia watcheth the declining sun?

Thou knowest how 'twas won,
 And what was writ thereon, —

“To the most fair.” How then,
 Shall I be called “most fair beyond the ken
 Of either Gods or men”?

My heart forebodes, another in some land
 Is found, to lift up an usurping hand
 Unto this crown, which I alone may wear,
 And henceforth walk before me, called “most fair.”’
 Hephæstus answered, ‘Peace! mourn not, sweet wife,
 For whoso flouts at thee, shall with his life
 Most dearly buy his words. Who can withstand
 Hephæstus, wielding with his mighty hand?
 Look! fair one, cannot he who fashions forth
 Those weapons dire, wherewith great Zeus can smite
 Rebellious giants from Olympus’ height,
 Cannot he, whose right hand hath forged the chain
 Wherewith Prometheus lieth bound secure,
 Defend thy loveliness from slanderous stain?
 For whoso moves malicious tongue, to cry
 Another, lovelier than thou, shall die.’
 ‘Yea! thou art strong, Hephæstus, thou art strong.

Yet with thy mighty hand, canst smite a song,
 Still the vibrations of the air, or crush
 A whispered word? The swift impetuous rush
 Of mighty men contending, may not stand
 Before thy weapons, or thy smiting hand,
 Yet is a whisper mightier than thou.
 The power that lieth in a woman's thought,
 Nay, but a sidelong glance, that meaneth spite,
 Thou canst not fathom, and thy giant's chains
 'Gainst these avail no more to bind, than might
 A silken thread blown by a maiden's breath.

Yea ! once the word is sped

For aye it goeth forth ;

Nor threatenings of death,

Nor death itself, nor callings from the dead

Can hush in silence what hath once been said ;

Hence to this task must I

With haste myself apply,

Search earth and Heaven, and find who thus doth dare

Arise before me, to be called "most fair."

Her punishment to other hand than mine

Must not be left, nor yet to clumsier wit,

Straight to devise some subtlety of woe

To hold her face to earth. Frown not ; I go

To seek this wonder. May thy task speed well

Ere I return. Farewell !'

While thus in sudden haste, with anger wroth,
Fair Aphrodite called her shining train,
And hastened forth unto the throne of Zeus,
The messengers of Hera, all in vain
Searched earth and Heaven, and all the vast domain
Of Gods and men, throughout the sea and air,
Through golden sunset clouds, and weeping skies.
Yet found they not sweet Iris anywhere,
But back to Hera hastened to declare
The end of all their labors. 'Nay! not there!
Not there!' From every whither sound their cries,
'Not there!' When even while they spake, behold!
Before them, beautiful, but pale and cold
With anger, Aphrodite stood. Her glance
In scorn on Hera turned, before the throne
Of Zeus she bowed herself, then spake. 'Perchance
O! mighty one! thou knowest why alone
I leave my lord to slave at thy behest,
While I appear before thee, to request
That thou wilt hear the grievance I have borne.
Full well thou knowest how within thy courts
Before thyself and all the vast array
Of mighty Gods, and fair Divinity,
I have been judged most fair, and how to me
The golden pledge was given, whereon the words

Inscribed, "To the most fair" should henceforth be
A token that alone, supreme, I stand
In beauty. Nay! flout not, O Queen! I plead
Thy cause as well as mine. Thou sayest indeed
The wife of Zeus is lovelier than I.

I care not, since the pledge is mine, but cry
Thy patience while I speak. Though little love
Is spent between us, now doth it behoove
That we unite to plead before thy lord,

Our common cause.

Winds passing sigh, brooks babble, and birds sing,
And every leaf that rustles whispers it,
"Behold how fair!" Upon my ear doth ring
These sounds, "Most wondrous fair, beyond the ken
Of Gods or men," creating discord vile
Within me. Hear! Thou Zeus! Most mighty one,
Spare me this torment. Place within my hand
The punishment of whoso dares to stand
Adored of all, before me or thy Queen,
— To whom supremacy doth still belong,

Being thy Queen.' —

While Aphrodite spake, a moving throng
Of bright, light-robed immortals, on the verge
Of Heaven's vast expanse appeared, the throne
With haste approaching, while as if to urge

More speed, light-footed maidens ran before
Like wingèd arrows, swift and sure of aim,
Each bearing bow and spear; and after them
Within a silver car riding with haste,
By maids attended, pale Artemis came.
The hosts of Heaven divided that her train
Might pass; but she looked neither left nor right,
Until before the throne she did alight;
Turning to Hera then she spake.

‘O Queen!

I have been told thy messengers have been
Through earth and heaven searching, but in vain,
For Iris, she who dwelleth in the plain
Of Elis even now, with hills girt round;
Wedded unto an humble shepherd swain,
Within a sheltered cot she may be found,
Serene and blissful in her lowly state;
For there last eve I saw her wander late
With Hyas, shepherd of the hills. Near by
Their simple home, a crystal spring wells forth,
From out huge moss-grown rocks, and over all
Droopeth a willow, sweeping to the earth,
That screeneth them in whispering solitude.
Thus doth she mock, O Queen! thy regal state,
Preferring thus an humble earth-born mate,

To consort of thy choosing. A dull clod,
 By earth-born passions fettered to the earth,
 Whereto his body base, to feed the sod
 Whereon he walketh, must full soon return.
 For this forsooth, she bideth humbly there,
 Kneadeth his bread, and tenderly doth care
 For weakling lambs he bringeth from the fold,
 And eke for him. Behold
 Much clamor hath been raised within thy courts,
 And dull dismay, wide-eyed, holds revel here,
 Mocking thy majesty with groundless fear,
 And why, O Queen? Because a little child
 Laughs on their hearth, or dabbles her bare feet
 Within the spring, or patters by the stream
 Playing with buttercups, or with the fleet
 Young lambs, that frisk and gambol in the vale;
 Who hath in her such mystic beauty rare,
 That many-tongued Nature crieth out
 In rapture, as she were some beauteous flower,
 Ne'er seen on earth before, most strangely fair,
 Which Gæa from her bosom doth unfold,
 To dream and smile, and with her smile to hold
 Both Earth and Heaven in thraldom to her will;
 Yet is this outcry needless here, for still
 The maid is but a child, and well I ween

Knows not the joy of homage, nor hath seen
'Any of hideous shape, grotesque or mean,
Whereby she may them with herself compare,
To know herself most exquisitely fair.'
Ere she had ceased, spake Zeus, with thunderous voice,
And words inexorable, nor gave he choice
Of penalties. 'Let Iris straight be called
To take again the place she doth disdain.
The child shall in Artemis' halls remain,
Her slave to be ;
Secluded from the sight of all
Save maidens of her own degree,
And sorrowing mortal women, who may chance
To stray within the precincts of her bower :
Being half mortal, shall she have the power
To suffer with them, bearing thus the woes
Of human kind, — which strike with deeper throes
Into the hearts of women than of men, —
Within her soul ;
And being half Divine, she shall have power, —
If so she list, — to help and succor them.
Let this be her Divine inheritance.'

"He ceased, and at his words well pleased, there rose
A murmur of assent. Still near the throne

Fair Aphrodite stood with troubled face,
Nor lifted she her voice till all were gone,
Then tremulously spake.

‘Great Zeus! Thy grace
I crave to hear me to the end. ’Tis well
As thou hast said, that she be hid from men.
Her beauty is not all the potent spell
She hath wherewith to lure away their hearts
From giving true allegiance unto us.
It is the spirit of humanity
Which dwelleth in her bosom, and doth sway,
— Being thus blended with Divinity, —
All hearts to love; and if such power be hers
To hold now in the early morning gloom
Of childhood, that all nature shouts for joy,
In the full fragrance of maturer bloom
Who can withstand her charms? Like mountain heights
Most glorious, most beautiful, most fair,
And lifted up into the wondrous lights
That emanate from thee, so far removed
From all that earthly is, or gross, yet cold
With snows upon their bosoms all the year,
Like these are we, and mankind turn with fear,
More than with love, to pay their homage here;
Hence will our altar fires full soon burn low,

If ever thou compassionate shouldst grow,
And raise this maid into thy courts above.
This boon which thou alone canst grant, I crave,
That she may be for aye Artemis' slave,
Unseen, unknown, unloved, of Gods or men ;
That she may never taste Olympian joys,
Nor take her place among the shining train
About thy throne, to be adored with noise
Of joyous tumult, as are we on earth,
With harps, and clanging cymbals, and with flowers,
And many-torched processions, white-robed maids,
And stalwart men leading the sacrifice
All garlanded unto our altars, — hours
Most precious to the Gods. Deny her these
And I will be content.'

“Then answered Zeus,
'Nay! daughter. Thou art difficult to please.
Why thus beset the maid? Wert thou not raised
From out the sea to teach men love? Why then
So filled with hatred? Thou art ever praised
For loveliness supreme, be then content.'
'To teach men love? Yea, surely I was sent
For this, and more, to be adored of men ;
But now, like as a serpent holdeth birds
In thrall, lo! hither cometh one so fair

That whoso looketh on her standeth dumb,
 Trembling to do her honor. Must I then
 Bow humbly down before her, who doth come
 To take that from me which is mine, by thee
 Bestowed, by hosts of Heaven and voice of men,
 Making the end of my existence void,
 And but a mockery? I tell thee, nay.
 I will not yield my place to any. Say
 But this and I will be content; that she
 Shall never be uplifted till she be
 Despoiled of that Divine exterior
 Which hideth her humanity from Gods,
 And maketh man adore her as Divine;
 Until some woman from the human throng
 On earth, shall of her will, unasked resign
 Her spirit unto death, that she may wear
 This yoke which holdeth down the maid,—her fair
 Exterior, her smile, her form, her hair,
 Her glorious eyes, yea! all she hath whereby
 She now is called “most fair beyond the ken

Of Gods or men:”

But let whoever mortal thus shall dare
 Covet this loveliness Divine, beware,
 Nor lay too rash a hand upon the prize,
 For whoso would usurp Divinity

Forever dies.’

“Then answered Zeus, ‘Yea! Thou may’st have thy will.
I know thee, that thou never wilt be still
Nor cease thy supplication here, until
All thy demands are granted. Go appeased.’
Then Aphrodite turned away well pleased
And sought again the earth, nor rested she
Till all was done, and her last wish obeyed.”

Here Lesta for an instant paused, then spake
Once more with tremulous voice.

“Behold the maid

Who thus hath no inheritance save woe!
My father Hyas, parted from his love
Grew sad and weary, weeping day and night
For Iris. Now Iona, thou dost know
How others weep for love as well as thou.
No more he blew melodious delight
From out his reed, to warble through the skies
His rapturous love, nor ever passed his door
Where she was not, but sat with longing eyes
Fixed on the spring, and waited for her there
Where first he saw her, till his beard grew long
And floated on its surface, and his hair
Grew down, and crept upon the mossy mound .
Like threads of hoary moss; while ever round

Him, grieving thus, birds sang,— he heard them not,—
By Iris sent to feed him day by day,
Until at last, Hera in Heaven grew
Compassionate, and pitying his sad lot
Spake unto Iris, saying, ‘Love so true,

And starve for love, with patience which doth lie
Deeper, yea deeper than the well of tears."

Here all sound ceased. And I with anxious fears
In silence listened, for the babbling stream
Was still. Even my beating heart did seem
To throb no more; while over field and dell
No breezes stirred, and brooding summer heat
Covered the earth, while dreaming day slept on

Where shadows fell,

As if some charmed spell

Held nature's self in thrall.

Then made my heart an outcry in my fear,
Lest in the silence I no more should hear
Words, in the music of the stream, nor know
More of the maiden Lesta, or the woe
Which filled Iona's soul with bitterness;
And with entreaties I began to break
The silence. "Sing again, O stream! and make
Thy murmuring voice to fall upon mine ear
In broken melodies, and let me hear
Once more those half formed words which tell of woe,
Life, love, and mystery long past. Why so
Hast charmed my spirit with a tale half told?
See how my heart within me groweth cold

And sick with fear, lest I shall hear no more,
Till scarce it beateth, waiting for thy voice.”
Then came the restless ripple as before,
Soft, faint and far, then nearer, nearer drew,
Until at last the theme my spirit knew
Whereof it sang, taking the thread anew,
Telling Iona’s story, how she spake
To Lesta in the darkness, hiding naught.



CANTO III.



CANTO III.

IONA'S STORY.

“My father Ion dwelt beside the sea,
A mighty man of valorous deeds, who fought
And conquered where he list, on sea or land ;
Who knew no law save his own will ; who paid
Homage to none save Gods ; whose mighty hand
Knew never other thralldom than the love
Which bindeth man to his own land and kin.
I dwelt within my father's courts, above
The sea, upon a rocky height. The din
Of restless waves beating the rocks, the scream
Of sea-birds overhead, and the hoarse cries
Of sailors, as they called from out their boats
One to another, were the sounds I heard
In childhood, and my childish lullabies
Were moanings of the waters, and the sighs
Of winds among the rocks, or through the halls
And many columned porches, wide and vast,
That decked my father's palace by the sea.

My brothers loved me, and my lot was cast
In pleasant paths. No sister's love I knew,
But gave my gentle mother all, — above
The loving homage and obedience due
Unto her from a daughter's heart, — the true
Allegiance of a younger sister's love.
Thus when my father lingered long afar,
Leaving his people to my mother's care,
My brothers being younger, unto me
She turned, with loving eyes, and even sought
Oft-times my counsel, saying, — 'Thou hast caught
And held within thyself thy father's soul,
O daughter mine ! hence shalt thou be

Thy father's self to me

Till he return.' At last for many months
He came not ; many, many months, and we
Grew sick of counting them by days and hours,
Oft looking on the sea, oft to the sky,
For omens of his safe return, whereby
We might prepare the feast, and with delight
Go forth to meet the conqueror in his might.
Weary we grew. And my sweet mother pined
For him she loved, and daily grew more pale
And wan with heartsick longing ; while her kind
Old nurse, Astica, with assiduous care,

Sought ever to remove her fears, and sang
 Unto the little Hylax on her knee
 Songs of his father's glory, and how fair
 His mother grew from childhood ; of the sea, —
 How soon his father's fleet along the shore,
 Far to the southward would be seen ; before
 The south wind each swift, white-winged ship would fly,
 Each bearing eighty oarsmen, strong and bold,
 And many soldiers goodly to behold,
 Both tall and strong, and laden with red gold
 And spoils of war, with glory and good cheer
 Hasting to reach their homes, where wives and maids

And children dear

Would come to greet them shouting words of praise.
 Thus singing, ever would Astica raise
 Her eyes, and look in my pale mother's face,
 Albeit with covert glance, seeking to trace
 Some ray therein, of joyful hope or glad

Expectancy ;

But ever as she sang, my mother drooped,
 Because a lying oracle had said
 'Thy lord returns no more. He lieth dead
 Where eagles scream, and vultures have laid bare
 His bones.' For these words, in her heart Despair
 Abode, and smiling Hope turned pale and fled.

Thus sorrowing she died ; for who hath care
For life, who hath no hope? — but to my charge
Left little Hylax, saying, ‘ Daughter dear,
Thou more than child to me, sister, and friend,
Unto thy faithful charge I do commend

The little one.

Be thou to him more than a sister. Take
The place I leave. Thy father being gone,
Whom hath he now but thee? But for my sake,
Call not thy other brothers from their tasks, —
Œágrus and Edonus—well may they
Gain wisdom in the schools, learn warlike arts,

And strengthen their young hearts
To mighty deeds of valor, that in them
Their father die not. Thou art young, and long
The hill of life before thee thou must climb.
The tide of wars a woman may not stem.

Although thy heart be strong,
To wise old Leros’ counsels give thou heed.
Thy father let him be, for thou wilt need
All wisdom ; for with might, with spears and swords
Man battles, while a woman hath but words
For weapons. Yea ! in wit and not in deeds
She conquereth, and slayeth with a breath.
Not long it seemeth, now that creeping death

Hath grasped me, since I held thee to my breast,
 My first-born babe, my blessing from the Gods.
 Child of my love, now shalt thou have no rest.
 The burden of thy country now must fall
 On thy young shoulders. Lift thy head, my child,
 And go before thy people as their queen,
 Whose word is law. The Gods have sent this call
 To thee. Go forth, and let thy face be seen,
 Tearless, and strong. Go forth as doth become
 Thy father's daughter. Know that what is best

For them, is best for thee ;

And when thy brothers come

Of age to lead in war, set my request
 Before them, that they straightway go in quest
 Of Ion's bones ; let them be laid to rest

Beside my own ;

For until this be done,

Forever shall my spirit stray alone,
 Seeking the soul of him I loved on earth,
 Better than life. Thus will thy parents be,
 Both outcasts from the land of spirits free,
 Both wanderers in empty, dreary space,
 And driven forth in endless, fruitless race,
 Finding no home, no peace, no resting place,
 Until thy father shall receive of thee

A sacred burial :

Hence let this, and the little Hylax be
Thy charge. Thou daughter dear, farewell.'

"Thenceforth, from that same hour I was no more
A child, but wore
The dignity of womanhood. The voice
That had foretold to us my father's death,
Was guided by a lying tongue. The breath
Had scarcely left her quivering lips, ere he
Returned, laden with spoils of war, and crowned
With victory. Amazèd that no sound
Of joyous welcome greeted him, before
His heralds with hot haste he strode, and lo !
From out his palace none came forth. The woe
Of wailing women rent the air, each door
Was filled with weeping maidens. I alone
Stood robed in white before him to speak words
Of greeting, miserable words and few,
Nor made I moan, nor shed I any tear,
But straightway spake.

'Father, thou comest here
To meet an evil fate,
For she whom well thou lovest, comes no more
To greet thee, smiles no more
For joy of thy return ; but for thy sake,

For love of thee, behold !
 She lieth in her chamber, cold, yea cold !
 Nor knows thy voice, nor yet that thou art near ;
 Because the oracle spake evil words
 Concerning thee, and whispered in her ear
 When first she sought the voiceful cave,
 Saying, "Thy lord is slain,
 He lies beyond the wave
 Upon a desert plain,
 By vultures torn."
 For this she grievèd night and morn,
 And grieving died.
 My father, bear this pain
 As thou hast often borne
 The sword-thrusts of thy foes. Then wert thou strong,
 Nor gavest sigh nor groan ;
 Hence leave salt tears to drop from women's eyes,
 As thou art wont, not from thine own.'
 Vain words I spake, for straight he passed me by
 As if he heard me not, and went alone
 Into her chamber, spake no word,
 But bowed him down before her. From that hour
 I never saw my father smile, nor heard
 His voice.. In silence from his side
 We bore her, for without, the white-robed throng

Waited to give her burial. Not long

Were they thus parted. Following soon
A fever smote my father, and he died.

Then all the people mourned, the strong
Bowed low, the humble grovelled in the dust,
And from the priestly temples wailing came ;
But while the people wept, they with the same
Breath clamored for their queen, and as needs must,
I with my women stood before them there,
And heard their cries and shoutings rend the air,
And saw the mighty people who were mine
To sway, thronging the gates, their faces turned
Toward mine, their arms stretched out to me. My heart
Grew pitiful and in my memory burned

The words my mother spake, that 'what is best
For them is best for thee.'

Then lifting up my head I spake to them : —
'Go forth, my friends, unto your homes, and rest
In peace. Your hands in every peaceful art

And kindly deed employ.
I know you, for a people who have served
And loved my father well, hence shall my heart
Forever beat for you.

Your joys, your woes are mine, your homes shall be
As mine, sacred to me ;

Your little children mine to love and bless.
My life I give to you, and to redress
Your every wrong, my joy. If foes assail,
Be strong; rise up against them, and prevail
As you are wont to do.

Ægrus and Edonus soon will stand
Before you, mighty men, fit to command
And lead in battles, skilled in warlike arts.
Till then, go to your homes, content your hearts
With simple joys, because your queen loves peace,
Not wars and striving: hence on all your land
May the great Gods shed smiles, and plenteous rains
In season. May your joys and wealth increase;
May fat abundance fill your garners full;
Your marriage feasts be many; may the sweet
And merry laughter of young children ring
Through all the land, new hopes and joys to bring,
Filling your hearts and homes with blessedness.'

“ I ceased, and at my words the people cried,
Shouting aloud my praise with one accord ;
Then turned, and many as the sands they hied
 Each to his home well pleased.
Demeter blessed us, and the Gods were kind ;
And many suitors came who sought my hand

In marriage ; but I loved them not, and bade
 Them seek elsewhere, that each might find
 To fill his choice a comelier maid,
 Saying — ‘I know ye well, ye Greeks !
For when ye love, ’tis with your eyes, your hearts
Come lagging after, crying out, “ Look well,”
 And “ Is the maid of comely parts?
And well possessed of loveliness?” Who seeks
A wife among you, seeketh beauty ; this
Have the great Gods denied me, hence for me,
I will not wed.’ At last Danaus came
 Across the sea,
With fair demands, and many regal gifts.
At which my counsellors, well pleased, began
To question with me, saying, ‘ Why dost set
Thy face so sternly thus against this man?
Were it not well for thee that thou shouldst wed,
As for thy people?’ Then in wrath I said,
 ‘ What ! shall I sell my father’s throne
 For empty words, and paltry gifts?
I will not wed him. None shall stand
Before you in the place my father held,
Save one whose veins are filled with Ion’s blood,
Whose sword can smite like Ion’s, and whose hand
Is guided by as true a heart, to deeds

Then to Danaus spake my counsellors,
Albeit with careful words, they spake my will ;
And he was wroth, and red with anger, turned
And sought his ships, saying, 'Thy queen hath spurned
Her master. It is well. She hath not learned
To bow her to another. She shall bend
As grass beneath my feet, when I return.'
I with my maids, beheld Danaus' ships
Like white birds, pass, and heard his oars-men rend
The peaceful air with shouts ; while with pale lips
And beating hearts, we watched them glide away
Far on the blue sea's rim, and rock and sway,
Riding the waves like sea birds. Suddenly
Above them hung a cloud, which momentarily
Grew darker and more angry, till I cried,
'Behold ! the frown of Zeus !' and as I spake
Strong winds strove with the sea from either side,
And met in elemental combat fierce ;
Causing the ships to rattle and to shake,
Even as pebbles shaken in the hand.
Then all the sky grew dark, nor sight could pierce
The density. We felt our faces fanned
From off the sea with the hot breath of strife.
Danaus' ships returned unto my land,
Dismembered giants, broken, hurled, and tossed

By the remorseless waters on the sand,
In fragments torn. His mighty hosts all lost,

And he no more :

And in the evening when the clouds were passed,
And nature all at rest, I with my maids

Walked on the shore,

And saw how thus the Gods had wrought for me.

Now is it hard for me to tell thee all

My story, Lesta, for the strife within

My bosom giveth me no words. I fall

Before thee here, to crave thy mercy. Give

To me thy beauty. Then thou mayest live

And share delights eternal with the Gods,

While I shall thus attain the end

Of my existence, be revenged, and die."

But Lesta answered, "Thou know'st not the tie

That bindeth thee to life, Iona. Send

Thy body to the grave, and still

Thou livest, but if thou dost change for mine,

Thy plain exterior, thou shalt fulfil

Only thy days on earth. Then shalt thou be

Like to the bubbles floating on the stream,

That laugh, and dance a moment, and are gone."

Iona spake again, "I crave of thee

Only this boon, nor would I have thee deem

My reason gone astray. See ! not one jot
Of all my bitterness will I conceal
From thee, nor any pang which I may feel
Shall cause my words to cease till all be told.

While thus we paced the sands
I saw one lie before me as if dead,
Tossed by the waves and beaten, but behold !
Most beautiful to see. His locks like gold,
Like burnished gold, clustered about his head,

While half within his hands
He held a lyre ; beside him on the sands

Was thrown a myrtle wreath.
In truth, most like a God he seemed, and we
In wonderment regarded him. My maids
Abashed, were silent. One spake low, 'We see
A God before us fallen in the strife.'
I answered, 'Nay ! not so ! The Gods die not.
Go quickly, let him straight-way be conveyed
Into the palace, that if any life
Remain, it may be cherished. He is laid
Before us by the Gods, that we may give
Him sacred burial, or if he live,
That we befriend him as becometh one
Beloved of them.' With haste my will was done ;
And he within an eastern chamber laid,

Returned to life, yet lay for many days
 Nigh unto death, while I in all the ways
 Of nursing skilled, cared for him tenderly,
 As for a child. So beautiful he seemed,
 In form and face so like a God, my heart
 Was stirred with gentle tumult that in part
 Was like to pity, and in part was pain,
 Yet was so sweet to bear, that I would fain
 Have laid me down beside him had he died,
 And breathed no more for very joy of it:
 Yet this none knew, for when his strength returned,
 That he could look into my face, I spurned
 The lingering thought of those sweet moments past,
 And in the secret chambers of my heart

I locked them fast,
 That when his eyes sought mine as they would say,
 'Draw near to me,' and would not turn away,
 I spake to him, 'My task is done'. I pray
 The Gods may give thee strength for noble deeds,
 As thou art formed for valor. I must needs
 Now leave thee to thyself, and to the care
 Of others:' then I sought my chamber, there
 To weep, to set my heart at rest, and then,
 To broider a new garment, and to call
 My maidens all about me, that again

They might betake them to their tasks. At last
One came to me and said, 'He from the sea
Whom thou hast saved, hath made concerning thee
Many inquiries, saying, "Who is she
Who hath through all these weary days been near?
Whose gentle touch wrought healing in my veins?
My sick heart longs for her. Would she were here
Whose dark eyes looked upon me in my dreams,
And soothed my spirit with their shaded light.
Why comes she not? So gentle was her mien,
And yet so regal, that methinks no queen
Could bear herself more royally than she :"

But when we told him of thy high degree
He turned his face away, and sadly spake,
"If she be queen, then what to her am I?
Give me my lyre, that I may sing of her and die,"
And so we left him singing there of thee.
So sweet the song, and yet so sad the strain,
That it would break thy heart to hear, O queen !'

"I answered, 'Nay ! Hearts break not for a song.
Go bid him live, and say thy queen commands
That he appear before her to declare
From whence he cometh, or if he belong
Unto Danaus' host ; then go prepare

A feast, and bid my singers all appear,
 All they who play upon the harp and lyre ;
 And to my counsellors and nobles say
 The queen commands you to the feast ; thus may
 All hear this stranger from the seas relate
 The tale of his adventures, and what fate
 Hath cast him on our shores.' And all was done
 As I commanded ; and the feast was great,
 And lasted many days. The stranger one
 Whom I had rescued from the sea,
 Foremost was he
 In song and dance,
 And ever in the games of skill, or chance,
 Stood second unto none.
 In very truth he seemed to be
 More like to Gods than men :
 And there before the assembled host he told
 His name, — the name that cleaveth to my tongue
 When I would speak it, — Diophantus. Bold
 In every glance ; supple his limbs and strong ;
 In movement restless, yet so full of grace,
 No eye could choose but follow him. His face,
 As changeful as the morning sky. His eyes, —
 But ah ! I cannot tell thee of those lights
 That stole me from myself, for when

His glance met mine, the throng to him seemed lost,
And he and I alone were there ; and then,
Such tenderness they wore, such softness rare,
Like light of Heaven when Artemis lies
Athwart the sun, that I, — my foolish eyes
Saw only his ; my ears heard but his voice ;
My every heart-beat told the moments past
That held him from me, till he stood at last
Before me with his lyre. He sang of home,
His home, far from the sea, where mountains kiss
The skies, and golden clouds sleep on their breasts ;
Of grassy plains, with dewy lilies dressed,
Where happy maidens roam ;
Of shepherds and their flocks, and of the bliss
None know, but those who dwell within those vales,
And love because they know naught else but love :
Then, had he been a serpent, I a dove,
I would have fluttered trembling to his breast,
And there in ecstasy of living, died ;
But being queen, I turned my face aside,
And gazed across the sea,
And said within my heart, ‘The world is wide,
Let him go seek a maid of like degree
Unto himself.’ Yet still he sang and sighed,
And sighing still, with cruel charm he drew

My heart from me. Ah ! well, full well he knew

I was no more my own, but his.

Then were we wed :

And all bowed low to him, for many said,

'The Gods have sent a suitor to our queen,

And this is he ;' and I believed their words.

Diophantus loved me? Yea ! And hast thou seen

The golden banded bee, from flower to flower

Pass swiftly, sipping sweets, and every hour

Seeking new blossoms for his honeyed kiss?

Such love is Diophantus'. I for this

Have given all : my life, my sacred trust,

My people's love, the peace that makes life joy ;

That now my spirit lieth in the dust

And crawls before thee, calling to the Gods

To hear me, — grant me vengeance. *Me ! a toy !*

To please him for an hour and be cast by,

Broken and worthless? or a stalk his hand

Hath, ruthless, stripped of flowers and leaves, to stand

And be a mockery for his pleasure? Nay !

I will not bend, nor turn aside, until

The Gods have heard me, and I have my will.

Erinyes holdeth me. My cause is just. —

For many days the hours sped merrily

A laughing round of joyous moments, each

More blissful than the last ; but for my trust,
The little Hylax, never would he smile
On Diophantus ; never would he reach
His little hand out toward him, as with touch
Caressing, for Diophantus loved him not.
And well his childish eyes perceived the guile,
My blinded glance saw not. I could not brook
The child's aversion, nor dreamed I the while,
Of aught but purest thoughts of tenderness,
In him I loved ; and gently chid the child,
With foolish sorrow at his stubborn will.
One day, — the sea was calm, the heavens smiled
Upon our love, the air was soft and mild
And brought us odors from the land of flowers
And of renewing life ; what bliss was ours !
What boundless joy ! — Diophantus took my hand,
And led me on across the beaten sand
Beside the sea, and spake there of his home,
And of the laden breezes from the land
Bringing sweet breath of flowers and thoughts of home.
And when I answered him, 'Thy home is here,
Dear heart, self chosen and bestowed on thee
Both by the Gods who brought thee, and by me
Through boundless love ; now in my heart, I fear
Thou longest for that other land from whence

Thou cam'st to me,'—he spake in gentle words

Most sweet to hear,

And called me by all loving names most dear,

Saying, 'Far rather would I linger here

In thy loved presence, debtor to thy hand,

Than own the kingdoms of the earth, or stand

Beside the fairest woman ever lived.

Rather be beggar unto thee, or slave

To tie thy sandals, fetch wherewith to lave

Thy feet, if I thereby might dare to touch

Even the silken girdle that doth press

Beneath thy breasts, across thy beating heart.

Yet now what joy is mine, that not alone

Thy girdle, but beneath thy snowy dress,

The heart it bindeth, yea ! thyself, my own

Forever art,

From thy crowned head unto thy jewelled feet.

I would not change my state, not for the seat

Of Zeus, not for the sceptre of a God,

Since thou art mine.'

I answered him, 'And yet thou dost repine ;

Thou longest for the land thou callest home.'

'Nay ! Nay !' he cried. 'Not for the land, sweet dove.

My father dwelleth there, and for the love

I bear him, when soft breezes blow, I roam

These sands and dream of him : his silver hair,
His stately figure, his majestic air,
And all the charms his presence used to wear
For me, his wayward son, whom well he loved ;

That oftentimes I start,

As I would clasp him to my heart ;
And oftentimes I seem to see his smile ;
But well I know he deems me dead, the while
I dwell in joyous pleasance at thy side,
And grieves for me. Since all Danaus' host

With whom I sailed are lost,

And I but barely snatched from death

By thy dear hand, my bride,

How may he know of this?

Hence throughout all my bliss,

A sadness bideth, that I turn aside

Ofttimes my face, lest thou shalt see the pain,

That hideth there.'

Again I spake, almost in anger, 'Where

Dost keep thy love for him, that thou canst thus

So smother it? Where is thy heart?

Know if he hath for thee but one-tenth part

The love I bear thee, he would grieving lay

His gray head in the grave. Why dost delay

And only dream thou seest him? Go hence

With speed, bearing rich gifts, and say
“Thy daughter sendeth these, for love of him
Who brings them to thee;” then when thou hast made
His aged heart young, for joy at sight of thee,
Return with haste, and may thy love for me
Be wings unto thy feet. May fair winds blow
To fill thy ship’s white sails, for well I know
The Gods who brought thee hither will bestow
Their watchful care, and bring thee once again
Unto these arms. It is a woman’s lot
To wait with sighs and tears her absent lord.
That lot be mine, till thy return.’

‘No word
Of love,’ he cried, ‘from other lips ere fell
With half the charm of thy sweet chiding. Tell
Thy heart this secret, — ’tis for love of thee

I have delayed. Nay! now, to see
Thee frown, gives me delight, for then thou art
Most regal. By my sword! I will not part
From thee. Nay! cannot, — but if thou wilt sail
With me, while seas are calm, and winds are free,
Right gladly will I go. And for rich gifts,
I will have naught but thee. Nay! turn not pale,
For thou art all I long for, all my heart

Delighteth in. How can we part?’

Where is a woman's strength when led by love?
Blindfolded she puts forth her hand, and cries
To him she loveth, 'Lead, I follow thee.'
Thus I to Diophantus. Woman dies
 Unto herself, and lives alone
In him she loves. I went with him. Our boats
 Spread silken sails, and clove the sea
With gilded prows. Ah! happy days! How shone
The golden God above, who conquereth night!
Each day was filled with music, and delight
 Went with us on our southward way.
Nearchus, one of wise and good command,
With half the court, I left in my own land
As regent there, that justice might not fail
Till my return; but ever by my side
I kept the little Hylax, and with him,
Astica, my dead mother's nurse; while dim
And faint behind us grew my native shore,
Fading and fading till it was no more;
And other lands spread fair upon our left,
And islands rose in green and purple haze
 From out the sea. Right merrily
The sailors rowed and sang; while in a maze
Of happy dreams my spirit slumbered on.
And every evening when the wind was low

We sought some sleepy islet of the sea
And moored our ships, that swaying to and fro,
Rocked with the rocking tide, in dreamy dance.

Ah ! heart of mine, be still !

Fair Lesta, if it were not for my vow

To be revenged, my words should cease.

How can I tell thee all ! My restless will

Cries, ' On ' ! My heart cries, ' Peace ' !

Thus for a space of five days, merrily
We sailed, and each night on some islet green
We rested till the dawn. With leafy screen
Of blooming, scented boughs our booths were made,
Fair nature's chambers ; and therein was laid
For each his silken couch ; while on the sward
Apart, the sailors rested, feasting there
Beneath the jewelled arch of heaven, each
Telling his tale of wonder or of war,

And dangers past.

One morn, while yet the dawn was faint, I heard
Without my bower, a woeful bitter cry ;
Mayhap 'twas but some lonely watching bird

Calling for its dead mate.

Whate'er the sound might be

My spirit knew it as the cry of fate.

I called, — ' Diophantus ! ' trembling in my fear.

He answered not. I rose, and he was gone.
'Astica!' then I called, 'Astica! hear!'
But all was still. With beating heart, alone
I left the fragrant booth, wherein full sweet
My sleep had been, and sped with flying feet
Calling, — 'Diophantus! Where hast hid thyself?'
The morning breeze blew cool upon my brow.
The lamps of night flashed one by one and died.
The blue mists shrouded sea and earth, while wide
Bright Eos threw the gates of heaven; but now
I heeded not the glory of the east.
Diophantus whom I loved was gone. I feared
I knew not what. I trembled lest the Gods
Had borne him from me. Suddenly appeared
Astica, shaking as with palsied age
Who yesterday was strong. 'What dost thou fear?'
I cried. She answered — 'Nothing, 'tis with rage
I tremble.' Frenzied then, I seized her arm,
Besought her with upbraidings tell what harm
Had fallen on Diophantus, — why if she
Had heard my call she had not answered me?
She said, — 'The anger in me choked my words.
I could not speak and so I followed thee;
For I have heard this night, that which — if thou
Wert not a Greek — would kill thee, yet I trow

Thou'rt made of mettle, which the heat of wrath
 Will only temper into sterner stuff.
 Look yonder, toward the sea, canst say what hath
 Become of all thy ships? each goodly sail
 Was given to the breeze, yea! hours ago.
 Now follow after me, nor weep nor wail,
 Till I have showed thee all.' But I stood still,
 And answered, — 'Tis a dream. I have not yet
 Awakened from my sleep. I will not fret
 Because I see no sail. Are they not gone
 For water? Where is Diophantus? Lo!
 The couch was empty at my side. Ah! no!
 I dream! Astica, waken me, I dream!'
 She answered me, 'I would that still thou wert
 Asleep, or even dead, that this great hurt
 Might not befall thee. Follow me, I pray:'
 And then she led me back and showed the bowers
 Where my attendants rested, torn away,
 Trampled and scattered. 'See!' she cried, 'four hours
 Ago they sailed away, and left thee here
 Alone with me, and with the child. No fear
 They will return for thee or him.' But still
 I comprehended not her words. No will
 Had I to move or speak: my heart scarce beat,
 Nor hardly might a whisper pass my dry,

Parched throat. My tongue clove to my teeth, my feet
Like leaden weights, hung on me heavily :
Yet all my fear and anguish were for one,
Not for myself. At last broke forth the cry
From my hot lips, the silence piercing shrill, —
'Where have they taken him I love? Tell me !
Diophantus ! Is he slain? Then let them kill
Iona also. Who hath done this thing?
Astica, speak ! Tell all thou knowest ! — Thee
The Gods have chosen to unveil

This mystery.

Speak ! or I crush thee !'

Then fell Astica on the earth. Her wail
Of anguish rose to Heaven answering mine.
She clasped my feet, she bathed them with her tears,
Rained kisses on them, crying out, — 'Tis thine !
O queen ! the woe is thine ! and still 'tis mine,
In that I love thee, as none others love.'
Then I grew pitiful for her, and sought
To raise her from the earth, and while my thought
Was given to her, my heart became more calm ;
And when she would not rise, I on the sward
Sat near, and took her gray head in my lap,
And tenderly besought her, — 'Say what hap,
Astica, hath befallen thee and me

This night. Pray thee spare not. Thy heart I see
Is grieving thus for me : but tell me all.

Say who hath stolen my love from me? Perchance
We yet may find him.' At these words in wrath

She rose, towering above me. 'Woman! hide

Thy face,' she cried.

'The serpent loves thee not, but led
By greed, and longing with desire for one
More beautiful than thou, hath gone to wed
Ilerda, the blonde woman of thy court;
Laestro's daughter, on whom all men's eyes
Are turned with favor. — All the words they said,
I heard them all. — What now are thy poor cries?
What are thy tears? Nay, shed them not; but rise,
And curse Diophantus. Curse him to the skies.
Let Hera be the witness of your wrongs.'

I only moaned, and gazed across the sea,
To see my ships come sailing back to me,
That never came. Astica still spake on.

'I dreamed concerning thee, — last night but one, —
A serpent wound about thee, with his fangs
Striking at thy white breast; and in my dream
I tore it off from thee. Then did it seem
To take Diophantus' form, and creep away:
And for the dream, I made a vow that day

To drink no wine, nor yet at night to sleep,
But waiting, hour by hour,
To watch beside thy bower,
Lest evil should befall thee, my loved Queen.
At midnight, saw I, like a shadow pass
Laestro, and beneath yon tree he paused.
Then slowly creeping from thy bower, *he* came,
The serpent of my dream. I saw them stand
Conversing there, and drawing near, in shade
Of yonder shrubs, I heard how thus they planned
To leave thee here with me and with the child.
I heard Laestro ask, — “How sleeps the queen?”
The serpent answered, — “Well,” and thereat smiled.
I saw his white teeth in the darkness gleam
In even rows. “The wine wherein last eve
She pledged me ere she slept, from Lethe’s stream
Was brought, and well distilled from poppy flowers;
From crimson blooms of sleep, its ruddy tint
Was drawn; that well I trow, for many hours
Her sleep will dreamless be, and deep as death.”
At this, I trembling sank upon the earth,
Nor could I move till thy call came, — my breath
Seemed gone. Laestro spake, — “Death let it be.”
Then quickly said Diophantus, “Nay! not so;
Speak not of death: living I fear her not;

But dead, — Laestro, never canst thou know
The power the dead may have. Her cold white hand
Would lie on my warm heart, till she had drawn
Me after her; or ever would she stand
In spirit between me and the fair bride
Thy daughter, loveliest maid, who soon will be
Queen in her place. Here let them stay. This land
Though small and uninhabited, is green,
And fair, and fertile. Let her here be Queen.
Her sovereignty we will not here deny.
Astica her chief counsellor, — her heir,
Young Hylax. If so be, they here shall die,
We know not of it, nor the fault be ours.
Nay! we will even leave provision here
For many days. I have no fear
They will return, — with neither sail nor oars.
See how unresting waves crawl round this isle
In many rings, like living chains. The while
Iona, with Astica and the child
Bide here, we are well rid of them. Beguiled
By tender speeches, she will never dream
That aught but dire calamity hath been
The cause of her desertion. She will frame
Reasons enough to cloud the sun,
Ere she will blame

Diophantus. Yea ! I know her well. 'Tis done
All as I wished. My dagger, red with blood,
Lies on the sand, with lamb's blood sprinkled there,
To show how valiantly I fought for her.
The garment also which last eve I wore,
Lies torn to shreds ; my necklace broken lies,
The jewels torn apart ; all these her eyes

Will fix upon. She will construe
Their meaning to the comfort of her heart,
Thus saving thee and me her curses dire."

"How of her brothers who are left? What fire
Canst thou invent to blind their eyes with smoke,
That they like hounds scent not our deeds?"
Spake then Laestro — "Know that we must needs
Beware. Young sons of Ares¹ are they all ;
And we do well to fear them."

"On their fall
Have I considered," Diophantus spake,
"Ere we return, thou shalt have naught to fear.
To free my path from both the other lords,
I will not fail. Think not of them, for they
Far on our northern border, where wild hordes
Of aliens have of late been troubling us,
Like lions have gone forth to seek their prey,

¹ Mars.

Eager for glory and for victory.
 And with them are my emissaries gone,
 Provided well with motives for their deeds.
 Thus it shall be, if they with all the haste
 And mastering frowardness of youth, must needs
 Stand first among the troops, they shall be first
 To fall, and if so be they fall, by foe
 Or friend, 'tis one to us. They are no more.
 The country is well rid of them, and so
 Are we. Come ! let us stir ourselves. Dost know
 What tale to tell the men? Say that this shore
 Is guarded by a dragon, horrible
 And fierce, who hath already borne away
 Their Queen, together with the lad, his nurse
 And thou know'st not what others. Shout and say
 Diophantus followeth for her rescue, swift
 As flying arrows have they gone ; and when
 Thou hast created uproar in the camp,
 I will return, — call order, — bid the men
 Fly to the boats, — relade them, — and set sail.”
 Laestro spake again, “ How if we fail?
 Or if Astica waken, or the child?”
 Then angrily Diophantus spake, — “ Thou fool !
 How if I left this matter to thy wild
 And wandering wit, so clumsily to plot?

Wouldst give sleep-laden wine to one, and not
To all the three? Nay! they all dream one dream
This night. Go! stir thyself, and fill the air
With frenzy. Let men shout, and women scream,
But guard meanwhile, with most assiduous care,
The bowers wherein the witless sleepers lie.
If any venture near, rail on them; cry.
That poisonous serpents hide within; or try
What subtlety thou hast, to lead them off.
And hearken, if we fail, 'tis thou, not I
Must fall, for unto thee have I alone
Confided; hence, 'tis either thou shalt stand
First after me, thy daughter queen, — or *die*.”
These words Astica heard, while dumb and still
She crouched upon the earth beside them there,
Listening, and waiting, while her very will
To move seemed taken from her, in her wrath,
Until her sense fled from her and she swooned;
And when at last her faint returning breath
Brought back her reason, they were gone, and she
Alone, stretched on the earth, with night dews drenched,
Hopeless and wretched. Then she heard my voice
Calling at early dawn, ‘Diophantus, where
Hast hid thyself?’ and she had left no choice
But rise as she was wont, and come to me,

Yet dumb and choked with rage."

"How may this be," —

Then Lesta asked, — "that thou art here, so far
From any sea-coast, or from home? What star
Hath led thee?" but Iona said, "Alas!
I know but this. My reason went astray
For many days, and I was witless quite.
Astica tended me, and kept alight
The fire the sailors left upon the strand,
A beacon toward the sea, and on the land
A cheering blaze, that gave both warmth and hope.

How long I know not, yet I know, —
It seemeth now a dream, — that far away
Upon the sea's blue edge, we saw what seemed
A boat upon the rocking tide,

Slow drifting near;

And now it seemed a boat, and now it gleamed
A pearl white shell, buoyed up; then did appear
As Amphitrite's changeful mystic craft,

With wide sail spread,

Dyed gold and red,

In western tints, when Phœbus rideth low;
And drawing ever nearer, and more near,
Our eager, watching eyes beheld, with fear
That mingled still with joy, and hope that here

Might be deliverance, a figure strange,
Nor fish nor man, that never yet I ween
Hath one so strange by mortal eye been seen,
Who spake to me, —

‘Hear! thou Iona, Queen!

The God of waters hath commanded me
To bear thee hence in safety. He will be
Thy friend, for he hath heard thy piteous tale.
For thee, the sea is calm, and thou shalt sail
Unharm'd to thy loved shores. See! for thy sake
The winds are soft and low.’ Astica spake,
‘Kind being, we will trust ourselves with thee,
For sure no state could e’er more woeful be
Than ours.’ For me, the direful thought of home,
And Diophantus’ crimes, filled all my soul
Anew with frenzy, and I cried, ‘My goal
Till death, shall be revenge; and I will roam
The earth forever. Yea, in death will lie
Unburied, until I have found whereby
I may accomplish it. Take thou the child
And nurse, both back from whence we were beguiled,
Our dear loved land. There may they lie concealed;
I will not there remain, in this sad plight
Neglected of mine own, a hopeless wight,
A mark for pitying eyes, the stranger’s scorn;

But morn and night, and ever night and morn,
My cry shall reach the Gods, to hear my woe
And grant redress. To free my father's throne

From him that, cursèd, cumbereth it.'

Then were we borne across the sea. Alone
I left them on my native shore. For me
They wept. The only lives to whom mine own
Still clung; and Hylax, reaching forth his arms
Sobbed out my name, and cried, — 'Sweet sister, stay!
Oh! leave me not.' — And then I sailed away;
But when my straining eyes saw them no more,
Again my grief o'ercame me. To what shore
That boatman strange conveyed me, I know not,
For when again I knew myself, this spot
So bright and beauteous, beguiled me,
And thy soft voice in music wakened me,
To seek once more for death, because of woe.
Yet now, no longer seek I death. Dost know
Why thus I have revealèd all to thee,
Which pride forbade me utter? Thou may'st see
If I indeed have sorrow. All save one,
My brothers in their noble youth are slain,
Myself an outcast, and my father's throne
Polluted thus by crimes, where never stain
Hath been. Yea! when I think on him whose voice

To me was sweetest music, and whose love
Was new wine in my veins, I have no choice
But curse him who thus gave me false for true.
What wonder that I rave, and tear myself
With inward throes? What wonder that I sue
For that wherewith I may accomplish all?
'Tis vengeance that I ask. Whate'er befall,
Give me but one tenth part the loveliness
Thou deemest but a curse. I ask redress.
Yea! woe on Diophantus, whom I loved
With love so tender, and so deep and true;
My happy life was his; each breath I drew
For him; and death would have been joy
To save him but one little scratch of pain.
All this is past. Let me not ask in vain
Thy help, fair Lesta. 'Tis a little thing.
I know the penalty of that I ask.
Yet if I may fulfil the direful task
That Diophantus' crimes have set for me,
Like as a taper flickers in the wind
And dies, so shall my life depart; the end
A fitting one for woe; but as for thee,
What gladness waits thee, if thou grant my plea?
Thy place among immortals thus to gain,
And joys of Gods; no more to feel the pain

That mortals suffer, and the bliss of love
To be forever thine."

Then answered Lesta, "Now Hope draweth near,
And smiling beckons me, and fair and clear
The Heavens open to my eager gaze.
What new delights are these? What shifting maze
Of wondrous thoughts, and joys untried, beguile
My startled sense! Ah! Mother Iris! smile
And love me as thou lovedst me of old.
'Tis she who comes, Iona! see! behold
The grace she hath. Thou spirit blest! Divine
Restorer of that life which thou didst give,
Draw near, draw near. Now do I feel, now live!
Yet nay! Iona. Nay! I will not leave
Thee plunged in sorrow, more than thou hast borne
Ere this. The threads of our two lives will weave
Thus crossed, a web of woe thou canst not break.
Sweet mother Iris! Hear me, for the sake
Of this sad woman at my side, and take
Away the curse that followeth the gift
I would bestow on her."

"I may not lift," —

Then Iris spake, — "one feather's weight of woe
From her sad lot. If she will rashly wear
Thy loveliness, so also must she bear

The curse that goeth with it, and no power
Can alter fate, save the high word of Zeus;
This only may I grant, that in that hour,
When Diophantus' love again is hers,
She may bestow on him what woe she will."
Iona bowed herself and spake. "He still
Hath honor who hath spurned my love. Restore
The throne of Ion to its rightful heir
My brother, and for Diophantus, more
Than this I ask not:—let his body take
The form that rightly fits his soul; within,
A serpent, let him crawl as serpents should,
And take him from the sight of men."
And while Iona spake, she trembling stood,
And would have fallen, had not Lesta turned
And caught her, with her beauteous arms entwined
About her. Thus they stood, while Iris spake:—
"The penalty is just, nor art thou blind
In what thou askest; hence, when he shall take
From thy red lips one kiss, then shalt thou be
Revenged with double vengeance, for the charm
Is thine. Behold this chain of milk-white pearls.
Wear them upon thy bosom, and no harm
Shall come to thee. They are the tears that fell
Last night but one, from thy dark eyes.

Thy sorrow thus before thee, thy strong soul
 Shall hold thee to thy task. 'Tis well
 Thou art content with that, for it is all
 Thou'lt have to comfort thee, when comes the call
 To yield thy strong and beauteous life
 For nothingness." Thus Iris spake. The strife
 In Lesta's bosom held her, dumb. •

“Now well

Content am I,” Iona said, and then

Deep silence fell.

The voice of Echo only through the dell,
 Cried on in sadness, “Well! 'tis well! 'tis well!”



CANTO IV.



CANTO IV.

THE RETURN.

STILL laughing, babbling, sighing flowed the stream.
And still I listened for the broken dream
Of words, to fill its music with the theme
Of its past singing. Now of future years,
Now of the past it murmured, till my tears
Fell fast, and mingled with its waters. Sweet
And plaintive was its voice, that never ceased ;
And as my tear drops met the waves, that fleet
And restless rippled on, nor paused, I heard
A silvery laugh, and then a sigh. — No bird
E'er uttered note so sweet, — then low and deep
The voice that told Iona's story spake
Once more slow, dropping words : Why dost thou weep?
Hear while I tell another tale, will make
Thy smiles return.

One day — the year was young,
The tender grass blades by the roadside sprung,
And nature in new loveliness arrayed
Lay dreaming in the sun, —

A woman, tall and beautiful, like light
Along the highway sped, her chariot white
As ivory, the wheels o'erlaid with gold.
Two fair white steeds, her hand with dextrous hold
Restrained. Her robes, like webs at morn alight
With misty jewels gathered in the night,
Wrapped round her, clinging fold on silken fold,
Revealing, yet concealing the rare mould
Of her lithe figure: all her waving hair
Coiled high in golden rings, by azure bands
 Confined: her arms unjewelled, bare.

 No ornament she wore
Save only at her throat, wound thrice about,
And falling on her bosom warm and fair,
A chain of pearls, milk white. Beside her there
 And seated at her feet
An aged woman rode,—who once was strong,—
With silvery hair; as one who hath lived long
And seen much sorrow, yet is still unbent,
Was she: and by the chariot a lad
Of noble mien and grace, yet humbly clad,
Sprang lightly forward, with delighted eyes
Noting each movement of the queenly one,
Rejoicing that he thus might near her run,
As he could so more quickly know her will.

Without a city's gate, 'neath grateful shade
 Of arching trees the woman bade be still
 Her restless steeds, and on the aged dame
 With kindly eyes looked down, and said, "Thy name
 I crave. Is it Astica? Nay! start not,
 I am thy friend;" — then to the lad she spake —
 "Go forward, pray thee, for a little space,
 And learn for me what news thou canst, — this place
 Is changed, and yet I know it well; — and make
 What speed thou wilt, while here we will remain
 Till thy return." Then to the dame again
 She spake, — "Trust me, Astica. I would ask
 Thy help as thou didst mine, when weary there
 I found thee by the roadside. This thy task:
 Take thou this purse of gold, pass yonder gate,
 And take the throngèd street that lieth straight
 Before thee; pass the first and second way
 That crosseth it, but when thou comest where
 The third path cuts across thine own, there stay
 And turn a little to the right. Around
 A clear outleaping fountain there thou'lt see
 A court, neglected, where grass grows between
 Uneven paving stones. An aged tree
 Stands in the court. Around, a house is seen
 Of marble, stained with age; before the door

Stand seven columns, fluted, of rare stone :
Beside the fount a dial, — like a leaf
Thou shakest. Hast thou ever been before
Where now I send thee?" Then with sigh and groan
Astica spake, "I fear thee, — I am old, —
My life of little worth, — yet do I hold
A fearful charge. Sweet maid, betray me not,
And I will be thy slave. I ask not gold.
Be kind. Twice hast thou spoken now my name.
Oh! speak it not again, for none must hear
It uttered in this place."

"Have no more fear," —

The woman said, "for know, I would not harm
One gray hair on thy head, for all the gold
On mine. Nay! I would help thee, nor alarm
Thy true heart with one fear. Did I not say
To thee, I am thy friend? Then trust me pray
With thy dread secret. More than half I know."
Astica answered, "When thou bad'st me go

To yonder house, I trembled. Oft those stones

My feet have trod, for there

Lived one whom my lost queen loved well, and where
The fountain plashed, she often sat to hear

His wise discourse. I fear

To enter there, lest he may know my face ;

For I must shield the lad in yonder place,
Till one be found to hear my tale, will guard
My secret well, who yet hath strength and power
To give me aid. The youth gone on before,
None know. He is the brother of my queen,
The son of Ion, and the rightful heir
Unto his father's throne. His brothers dead, —
His sister now no more, — this old gray head
Alone hath he for his dependence. May
The Gods be kind."

She answered her, "The way
To reach the end thou seekest is through me.
I know thee and the lad, young Hylax. Yea!
I know thy queen, whom still thou lovest. Nay!
Bow not before me. I am but as she
A mortal. Well I love the lad and thee.
Be faithful, and in doing thus my will,
Anew thou givest thyself to her, and still
Dost serve her as in days of old; nor harm
Shall come to thee nor to the lad. This charm
Of gold and jasper, — thou dost know it well,
The clasp Iona wore above her arm,
I have concealed it in my girdle. — Tell
The aged Leros, he who still doth dwell
Whereto I send thee, that Iona asks

Of him a favor. If he doubts thy word
Or deems her dead, give him the clasp. The spell
Of mystic symbols hereon traced, full well
He knows them, and the happy time long past
Wherein he taught their mysteries to her,
And to reward her well-conned task, at last
Gave her the bauble. Bid him not betray
The wrongèd queen he loved: but for her sake
Be father unto me, Ianthe. Take
The gold I gave thee, bid him therewith hire
What servants I may need; say the desire
That fills Iona's breast is this, that none
May know she lives, but thee and he alone.
Tell him one named Ianthe, bringeth word
Of her, and is of noble birth, and fain
Would find a shelter in his house. This done,
Return, I will remain here with the lad
Meanwhile." Astica trembling stooped and kissed
The woman's glistening robe, the while her sad
And wrinkled face, shone with the joy of hope;
Then looking in the woman's eyes replied,
"The Gods requite me ill, O beauteous maid!
If I do not thy will. She hath not died,
She whom I loved, and held a tender babe
Upon this bosom; noble, wrongèd queen.

The Gods are just. The Gods are just. But see !
 Hither the youth is hasting. I will flee
 To do thy bidding. Call him not, I pray,
 The name his mother gave him, lest some ear
 Unkind, hearing the word, shall swift, betray
 The lad to cursed Diophantus. Fear
 Thou him who sitteth on the throne.
 Although I be an aged wrinkled crone,
 I know whereof I speak. Give heed, sweet maid,
 Unto my words. Thy loveliness to thee
 Is dangerous, even as is the name
 Of Hylax to the lad. Be thou afraid
 Of Diophantus' eyes. May he not see
 Thy face." Ianthe answered, smiling,

"Nay,
 I fear him not. Rest thou in peace for me."
 Shading her face, and staff in hand, her way
 Astica took, and to the lad a word
 Of caution spake ere she passed on. While he
 With eager flight, like as a skimming bird
 Poises a moment and then darts along,
 Scarce paused to hear her voice, ere he was gone
 And at the woman's side ; with eyes aflame
 And earnest boyish glance, into her face
 He gazed. Right royally himself he bore,

And she with pride looked on him ; asked what name
Was his ; whereat he smiled, and turned aside
His glance. Then boldly gazed again, and cried
“ Call me what name thou wilt, all names were sweet
If uttered by thy tongue. I have been fleet
To do thy will. There at the city’s gate,
Without, within, the thronging people wait
To see the king ride forth : he comes this way
With all his train. I heard them there relate
How brave the sight, how on this gala day
He driveth in the race ; all cased in gold
His chariot ; his steeds coal black. To hold
Them back doth task the strongest arm in Greece
Too heavily ; yet was I told
He with one hand restrains them. There ! Behold !
The crowds rush forth ; they part ; the way is clear ;
He comes.” Then spake the woman.

“ Bide thou here.

I know thee, lad, for thou art Hylax. Fear
No harm. Astica trusteth me, and all
Is well. Henceforth, my brother thee I call,
Because my heart goes out to thee. Conceal
Thyself. Stand yonder, on the hither side
Of my white steeds ; hold them with kindly hand,
The while I face the king.” Then with the pride

That joys to serve, yet in amaze, his stand
Beside the steeds with eager haste he took.
The lovely woman, white as her white robe,
Stood calm and still. A shade, a troubled look
Passed her fair face a moment, and was gone,
Like as a silver cloud veils the fair moon,
And passing, leaves her brighter, fairer still.
Thus stood she waiting, by her own strong will
Held there. Her eyes were eloquent as stars
That in the skies at even, high and clear,
Voice forth a melody men strain to hear,
And may not. Swiftly nearer, and more near,
The king rode gayly on. Behind his own
Pressed other chariots. A kingly throne
Befitted well his royal bearing; none
In all his train, so stalwart, tall, and fair.
Yea! scarcely in all Greece could one compare
With Diophantus. Suddenly his eye
Fell on her, standing there, who white and shy
Shrank from his glance. A white dove from the sky
She seemed, who fluttered to be free, to fly,—
Yet could not break the spell of that fixed look.
The king drew in his steeds, and all his train
In breathless silence waited while he spake.
“Sweet, beauteous maid! what dost thou here? I fain

Would hear thee speak. Whence art thou come, and where
Dost guide thy snow-white steeds? Why art thou here
Alone? Thy equipage is queenly. None
Attend thee but this lad? Hast thou no fear
Thus in thy loveliness to stray alone?"

The woman, bowing low spake softly.

"Nay,

Most goodly king; for hearing far away

That here in truth reigned one

Sent to this people by the Gods, my way
I took without concern, knowing thy rule
Must be both wise and just. I only pray
Thou wilt pass on and leave me. I but wait
A messenger, whom I sent on before."

Then Diophantus answered,

"Nay, but more

I asked of thee." She said,

"What is thy right

To know, I tell thee." Lifting then her head
She looked on him. "My way lies by the road
Thou camest. In thy city there I dwell,
With one named Leros, whom my heart loves well.
An aged, wise old man, whose fame hath spread
For wisdom, even into far-off lands.
Beside the fountain in the spreading shade,

I sit each day, and at his feet I learn
The lore of Egypt; of the lights that burn
Above us men call stars; how by the will
Of deities that guide them on through space
To move, or wheel, or hold them fixed and still,
They circle or remain; how thus they rule

The destinies of men.

Mild Leros! He doth school

The wayward thought and brain;

And the wild pulse of youth, his calm words tame
To slower pace. He fears nor death nor pain
Who drinks with Leros, where thought dieth not."
Then answered Diophantus:

"Sure, thy lot

Was never cast with earth-born souls. What way
So e'er thou camest here, thou art supreme
In all that maketh women fair. What may
Thy need of knowledge be, I pray thee, more
Than yonder sweetly blooming wayside-flower,
That lifts its face, for kisses, to the sun?"

"Nay! noble king, wise Leros teacheth me
The fragrance of a flower is like the mind
Of woman; be it ne'er so fair to see,
If it lack sweetness, it is soon cast by
And perisheth unloved. Thus with a maid;

Her smiles and outward loveliness allure
The passing throng 'a moment ; while the pure
Fair spirit wisdom hath enriched, hath sure
Delights, rare thoughts her fragrance, that endure
Beyond the grave, and hold in loving thrall
All hearts."

"Thy words commend him well
Who teacheth thee. For king, as well as maid,
I hold, should such divine repast be laid.
I also will betake me to that fount
Thou lovest. Vision blest, farewell, and take
To Leros, Diophantus' courtesy ;
But stay, thy name I asked." While thus he spake,
Stone cold and pale she stood ; at last returned
The rose tint to her cheeks, the life blood burned
Its color in her lips, that trembling moved
To speak the name — "Ianthé ;" then she turned
Unto the king, and as his state behooved,
Bowed low. With supple grasp her idle reins
She caught, while Diophantus passed. Her veins
Were filled with fire, that from her heart rushed forth
In angry floods : and as he onward drove
He ever backward cast his glance, while she
Nor turned to look on him, nor yet to see
The passing throng. Within, her spirit strove

To check the tumult of her thoughts. The king
But saw her, as a wind-blown flower, that droops,
And no more lifts its face to greet the sun.
With flying feet, along the highway, troops
Of merry youths and maidens passed. As one
Who dreams, she saw them moving by. At last
Astica came, hastening her aged steps.
Then spake she to the lad :

“The king hath passed.

Draw near, I pray of thee.

Henceforward I will be

Thy sister dear, and thou shalt dwell with me
In Leros' house ;”—her gentle voice was low
That none might hear,—“for there full well I know
A welcome waits me. Now thou hast one foot
Upon the steps that lead to Ion's throne,
Whereon yon serpent basks. Thou, Ion's son,
With pride I look on thee. Astica, come,
Ride now,—thy aged limbs from toil need rest,—
And tell me how old Leros my behest
Received.” Astica answered,

“Well, kind maid,

For when thy token in my hand he spied,
His fingers trembling seized it, and he cried,
‘She lives ! Iona lives ! and this hath sent

To me, a token. Yesternight I dreamed
Of her. A white dove from the South flew near,
And round me, while beneath its wing I seemed
To see this clasp.' With joy he spake. With fear
I trembled lest unwittingly some ear
Catch at his eager words, and straightway give
My secret to the winds, and bade him guide
Me to an inner room. There did I hide
No part of all my story; and thy will
Made known to him. With joy he heard, and cried,
'Go fetch the maid Ianthe. Bid her here
Most welcome be;' then hastened forth to fill
His house with service, as should fitting be
For such a queenly one as thou; and still
He muttered as his way he took, — 'She lives.
Yea. Well I know she lives. Now shall we see
Great things transpire, or all my augury
Is false, that hath ere this been true.'"

"Now be

Content, Astica. Henceforth leave to me
Thy burden, and thy charge, for thou hast borne
It well, and in thy service true, hast worn
A heavy heart. She will requite thee well,
And well she loves thee." Thus Ianthe spake,
Her beauteous face alight; while her glance fell

With love and tenderness upon the lad,
 Who, fleet as deer, and joyous as a bird,
 Ran leaping by her chariot. No word
 She spake escaped him, and his heart grew sad
 If she but turned her face another way.
 Thus hastening, soon they passed the city gates,
 And near'd the house of Leros, ere the day
 Had reached high noon; and there, as one who waits
 Impatiently, she saw him stand within
 The heavy shadow of his door, while one
 Came forth to lead away her steeds. The sun,
 Old Leros thought, ne'er shone on one so fair;
 And bowing low before her, thrice he spake
 Her welcome, saying, "For the sake
 Of her who sent thee, tarry long with me."

"Let youth to hoary age obeisance make,"
 Then said Ianthe, "I would pray of thee
 (Who come alone, unfriended) let me be
 More than thy guest; I crave to sit as one
 Who gathered wisdom from thy lips long days
 Ago,—it seemeth now an hundred years,
 And yet, I still am young, such cares and fears
 Have compassed me about,—I have for thee
 A message, I would fain convey apart
 From all." Then answered Leros,

“Come with me.

I tremble for thy message, and my heart
Presageth all the import of thy words.
Beneath thy glorious exterior
I see my queen. Thy noble soul, my art
Divines, that looketh not on outward things.
If thou hadst come to me with hideous wings
Of bat, or blind and crawling like a mole,
A craven thing, or from the arching skies
Dropped here, or in whatever form thy soul
Encumberèd might be, old Leros' eyes
Would pierce thy covering, and know thee still.”
Then falling at his feet she wept, and cried,
“Forgive me, father, that I sought to hide
Myself from thee. I come but to fulfil
The end of my existence, and to bring
Just condemnation on the head of one
Who hath most grievously wronged Ion's son,
And sitteth basking in ill-gotten power
Upon the throne.

But let him stay, there cometh yet an hour
When he shall feel a wrongèd woman's hand
Weigh more than mountains, — heavy as the grief
Iona bore for him. Yea ! let him stand
A few days longer on the hollow crust

Of lies, which he hath builded 'neath his throne ;
 A little longer let him smile, and trust
 To smoothly flowing words. I stand alone
 To execute just vengeance. Father, pray
 Grant me refreshment here, and while I rest,
 (I faint for weariness), if any stay
 Within my city here, who still are true
 To me, go find them ; but to my request
 Give heed. Say not, Iona lives, but say
 The lad young Hylax lives, and is thy guest.
 How by his aged nurse he hath been reared,
 Who faithful to her charge, hath come to thee.
 Bind all to silence, till the way be cleared
 To place him on the throne, and let there be
 No whisper in the air to reach the king.
 For I would deal with him, alone. This thing
 Thou lookest on, my beauteous form, is all
 My weapon ; I have dearly bought revenge.
 Iona's spirit dieth with the fall
 Of Diophantus. Listen ! I have sold
 Myself, to curse him. Shrink not back. Behold
 My beauty. Is it not divine ? Though old
 And dim, I see thine eyes do speak its praise.
 Call me no more Iona. Let me be
 Ianthe, till the fatal hour hath come."

Then answered Leros, "I do hold to thee
Allegiance, yea ! I bow unto thy will
Even as when thou wert upon the throne.
Ilerda is no more. She and her child
Lie in one grave. Thus Hera sendeth ill
On those who break her laws.
Nearchus liveth, and retaineth still
A loyal mind ; and many more there are
Who bear not kindly the usurper's yoke.
I know them well, and quickly will invoke
Their aid. But speak no more of death, O queen !
Thy people love thee still, and well I ween,
They long for thee and for thy gentle rule."
"By all the Gods, I charge thee, speak no word
Of me," she cried, "nor let my name be heard :
For true and noble was the love I gave
To Diophantus, — he hath cast me by.
Dost think thy queen returns a suppliant? Nay !
Far rather would I strike, and unknown die,
And in the memory of my people live, when I
Reigned serving them, rejoicing thus to serve."
While thus she spake, a slave brought food and wine ;
And Leros answered her, "I will not swerve
From any task thou givest me ;" and turned
To do her bidding. In her weariness

She sought her couch, and slept. Her spirit yearned
For restful sleep, as in the days gone by ;
Sleep that forgetteth, in reality
Of dreams as sweet as morning hopes.

What may

Betide? Even kings fall dreaming of fair maids,
And smile no more at courtiers' flattery.
Thus Diophantus, riding forth that day,
Thought only of Ianthé ; of her smile,
What might it be? or were she aught but grave?
If being grave, so fair her face, to crave
A smile, or call one there, indeed were bliss.
And ere another day had passed, no more
He cared for kingly sports, — no more for this
Or that past pleasure ; he would see
The wondrous one again, or know if she
In truth abode in Leros' house. Thereto
A messenger he sent with gifts, to say
The king would speak with her ; that he would view
Once more her face, and, ere the close of day,
Would seek her at the house of Leros, there
To have discourse with her. And when he came
To her, and saw her stand beside the clear
Smooth pool that fed the fountain, with the same
Sweet, moonlight loveliness reflected there

That in the morning had entranced him, fair
Beyond all power of man to dream of, near
He drew. No thought beyond the radiance
Before him had the king, and little knew
The spirit hidden by those drooping lids;
The spirit of Iona, that anew
Burned with her wrongs. With silence that forbids
Too urgent speech she waited him; and he
Half awed, a moment paused, then took her hand,
And,—like a rose that swinging fair and free
Bloometh for all,—he held it to his lips.
Like petals pale and pink, and silken soft,
That woman's hand. What wonder he would oft
Repeat the kiss, but that her eyes forbade?
“Fair one! why crown with pensive look so sad
Thy loveliness?” he said. “Hast thou no smile
To greet thy king? Words that beguile
The heart from care befit those lips; not well
Agree grave thoughts and lovely dames. To wile
Away slow moving hours, come, let us here
Beneath this friendly arching tree repose,
And give time wings with merry converse. Fear
Me not, I would but see thee smile. Thy still
Demeanor crieth truce to words, or else
Thou fearest me.” She answered,

“Nay! it ill

Befits a woman waywardly

To chatter; and for smiles, thy fill

Thou surely hast of them, for none dare frown

Upon a king, and he who wears a crown

Need never sue for smiles or praise. Art thou

In truth my king? No sovereign have I now;

But only to the Gods who reign supreme

Above all kings, I bow;

Yet for thy kindly courtesy, O king,

And for thy gifts, I thank thee, and will here,

If 'tis thy will, converse with thee, or sing

And strike my lyre, or call my slaves to bring

A feast, and spread before thee. Yet I cry

Do naught to haste the hours, but let time lag,

For all things pass with time, and thou and I

Or soon or late, whate'er thy state

Or mine, to the decree of Fate

Must bow; and then, though heavily and slow

Time moved before, too soon will come the end.”

“Thy words are wisdom. Pray thee, I would know

Hath Leros taught thee thus? nor yet to bow

Thy beauteous head before thy king? Ah, well!

I grant him pardon, since I would not see

Thee less than proud.” She answered,

“It is he
Hath taught me loyalty. Bethink thee. Here
Am I a stranger, a sojourner, I !
The daughter of a king ! Whom should I fear
Or bow before ? but where my heart leads forth,
There give I all.”

“Now do I know thee. By
These words, thou art a woman ; else had I
Thought thee divine and worshipped thee. Behold
My city, beautiful and great. Red gold
Have I ; my palaces are many ; yea,
My slaves, and soldiers, many as the sands ;
My ships sail every sea, and with all lands
I barter for all costly fabrics : all
I lay before thee. At thy lightest call
My slaves shall run to serve thee. All is thine ;
Dwell where thou wilt. Choose for thyself the fine
Spun gold and linen that my fleet ships bring ;
My rarest gems I give thee ; but thy king
Must Diophantus be : and for all these,
He craveth but a smile. That look doth freeze
My blood. Why start and tremble so ? Why turn
So pale ? Ah ! now 'tis well. The roses bloom
Once more. Like stars that through the hush and gloom
Of night bring joy, thine eyes shine on me, clear,

And far above me as the skies.
Thou hast not told me whence thou camest here,
Nor what far land hath lost its fairest flower
In thee."

"I came from Elis hither. Near
The vale where fair Artemis wandereth

At evening. There for seven years
My spirit dreaming slumbered, till at last
I wakened at the Gods' command, and fast
I journeyed. At the feet of Leros now
I sit to gather wisdom, as of old
I sat in happy childhood. Now, behold!
Mine eyes have looked on Diophantus; bold
As is the untamed lion; beautiful
And strong. No man in Greece — thus am I told —
May stand beside him. Yet withal I see
He can be gentle; still my heart cries, 'Hold,
And grant a little time, or e'er I say
Great Diophantus is my king.'"

"I pray
With all thy learning leave a little space
Within thy heart for me, and ever trace
Between the wise words Leros teacheth thee,
The name of Diophantus. Let me be
Unto thy fancy, slave, or king; no more

I ask than this, that thou shouldst call me thine."
She bowed her as a lily bows before
A sudden wind, that striketh harshly, then
Lifting her head she cried aloud,

“Not mine !

My king? My slave? I pray thee give me time,
Nor jest with me. I have no need of gold,
Or slaves ; and for thy jewels, I wear none.”

“Those pearls upon thy bosom are most rare.”

“Ah, yes ! I have a tale of them. Each one
Hath meaning for me.”

“Pray thee, then, declare
To me their meaning.”

“On another day
That will I do ; but now methinks, aright
I cannot tell the tale, or thou wilt say
’Tis dull.”

“O wondrous maid ! How dost thou smite
My heart ! My each request, however slight,
Thou dost refuse ; and yet have I the might
To bend thee to my will, if so I would,
And make thee feel my power ; yet do I choose
To stoop to thee. Yea ! give thee homage. Lose

My high estate, and be for thee a child
Suing for smiles and tales."

"Here hast thou wiled
An hour away—king as thou art! Hast thou
No higher game at which to shoot thy darts
Than me, a helpless woman? Nay, I trow,
Turn where thou wilt, are faces fair as mine
To give thee smiles and glances. What is thine,
Go take, and leave me spotless as I came.
I dare thee! I defy thee! As for fear,
I know it not. In peace I journeyed here,
Nor asked I boon of any, granting none."

"Thou art capricious as a winter's day,
Swift turning thus from calm to storm, nor one
Kind glance hast thou bestowed, so is thy sun
O'erclouded. Think on me. Most kind and fair
Have I bespoken thee, who am unused
To be denied; yet am I angered not.
And once again, though all thou hast refused,
I make request. Bid me again, I pray,
To thy fair presence."

"In thy clemency
Thou art most kingly, nor thy kindly sway
Will I deny. Hence when thou wilt, return:

But ere thou leavest me, drink of this wine
My slave hath brought. I pray thee do not spurn
Ianthé's offering. Drink thou, lest no more
We meet as friends ;" and on the rough, paved floor
She kneeling, dropped her gaze. Above her head
She held a cup of gold, filled with the wine, that red
And glowing tempted him. Then from her hand
He took the jewelled cup : but ere he raised
The sparkling flood to quaff, on her he gazed
A moment unrestrained ; while with quick pain
His heart smote on his side, as it would fain
Break from its prison, like a caged wild thing
That would be free, to seize its own delight,
Unbidden. Calm and still, and far from him
As skies at evening, seemed she there ; such sight
Of gentle loveliness, entrancing, rare
As wonderful, within his spirit wrought
A madness, that with haste he drank, and caught
 Her from the floor,
 And with deep indrawn breath
 By all the Gods he swore,
And by the wine her hand had given him,
 That he would drink no more
Unless by her bestowed ; and to his heart
He would have clasped her, — kissed her, — but apart

She shrank from him. Her silken, glistening dress
 She gathered close about her lest by chance
 It touch him as she passed ; nor could he press
 Her longer to remain, nor to enhance
 His suit, could speak one word ; within his soul
 Such tumult rose, that he was dumb with strife
 For mastery of himself, and with his whole
 Strong being shaken thus, he let her pass
 And unforbidden leave him.

Then alone,
 With flashing eyes, and quivering lips, as one
 By inward impulse moved and by the will
 Unguided, swift from room to room she strayed,
 And through the wide and empty halls, until
 Again she stood within the court. Arrayed
 In evening splendor by the dropping sun
 The fountain sparkled, and the dial stayed
 Its shadow at the latest hour of day.
 Alone she paced the stones, her heavy hair
 By trembling fingers torn from its smooth bands
 Fell downward to her feet, golden and fair,
 A veil of woven sunlight, while her hands
 Clasped tightly the white pearls, her smooth neck bare
 And white as they. Her eyes fixed on them ; bright,
 And like the fountain, sparkling, with their load

Of unshed tears. So beautiful a sight
And yet so sad, hath never mortal seen.
At last in words her anguish hurried forth.
“Ah me! Oh! heavy heart of mine! To glean
One smallest ray of hope, to south or north
Or to the skies above, I may not turn.
All nature laugheth with delight and life,
While I, a dead thing, creep these stones, a curse
Upon my lips for him whom I — oh! strife
Within me cease! — him whom I loved. Far worse
Than death is life like this; lived but to mar
Another life. Ye Gods! Have pity. See
My misery. My feet drag heavily.
I sink with sorrow. I would haste and flee
Away from Diophantus ere my curse
Fall on him; at my feet I seem to see
Him writhe, transformed and hideous. Ah me!
Because I loved him shall I do this deed?
A white shrine, wherein none but he before
Had entered, holy, pure, the heart I gave.
Hath he defiled it? Nay! Though wronged, no more
Beloved, I cannot curse him thus. .

I rave.

Have I not sold my life for vengeance? Save
This Diophantus, who hath turned away?

Laughed at my pain? At last hath come his day
 To taste the bitterness of scorn, to sting
 With unrequited love. Yea! let him play
 A while about the flame; if he but bring
 His lips to mine, a shrivelled, crawling thing
 He lieth at my feet, despised of men,
 Accursed forever. And for me, what then?
 Oh! glorious Sun, that dippest now beneath
 The rim of Heaven, shine on me! unsheath
 A moment longer your bright flaming swords
 Of light, and pierce my being! Earth! my words
 Are foolishness to praise thee. Thou dost turn
 Death into life; to joyous throbbing life.
 Thou sayest to the flower that droopeth, — ‘Rise,
 For thou shalt bloom again,’ so dost thou prize
 All life, and to the worm that crawls, dost give
 Bright wings to dance in happy life; and eyes
 Unto the fields, yea! myriad flowers, that live,
 And smiling lift their faces heavenward,
 While I live not. How doth my spirit long
 To breathe the sweet air, winging like a bird
 To yonder far-off clouds, with joyous song!
 What is this thought that stirreth in my soul
 With memories sweet? A half-forgotten dream
 It seemeth me, that cometh like a gleam

Of light into a dungeon. 'Men know not
The waking of that sleeping they call death.'
Shall I then waken, live, and feel? My breath
Gone from me, shall I drink again the sweet
Soft air? Wise Leros sayeth, as the rose
Drops all its silken petals at our feet
And dieth with the day, yet ever grows
With each recurring season to make glad
Our hearts, — from life to death, from death to life
A never-ceasing round, all nature shows,
Watched over by the Gods, with patient strife
And endless care, — so we, of nature part,
Shall slumber for a little like the rose
By death laid in the dust; yet shall we start
Anew with joyous life, and in some land
We know not whither, will our spirits find
Fresh joys, akin to these; no more in blind
Obedience to dwell, but like the Gods
Uplifted to delights eternal. Clods
Are these encumbering bodies that we wear
And glory in, that heavily, still drag
Us earthward, chained unto our tombs.

I bear
Too great a burden, and no human hand
May lift one feather's weight. Ye Gods! I stand

Alone before ye, and my spirit cries
 For life, that hath no life. Hear ye ! naught dies
 On earth, save only I ; for when is done
 That vengeance just, for which I live, no one
 Nor here nor there shall know Iona ; none
 Shall think on her but as a thing no more.

In dust this form, beneath the feet
 Of creatures of the earth, shall crumbling meet
 Its kindred soil. So near am I the end,
 The hopeless end of my existence. Send
 Some light to me, for all is dark, and I

Grope blindly and in pain, for that
 I may not seek. Earth mocks me. Birds that fly
 Sing of glad life, and clap their wings, and cry,
 ‘Fly with us upward.’ Every blossom near,
 Feeling the secret springs of life, hath joy,
 And looks at me askance, as it would fear
 A woman with a curse. The lizard near
 The fountain slips away in fear lest I
 Should crush it with my foot. Poor harmless thing !
 Love life ; live on ; I would not have thee die.
 Though thou and I live for a kindred doom,
 Thy lot is best. Thou doest no man hurt ;
 And happy in each moment, thou hast room
 For kinship with thy kind. Thou knowest naught

Beyond thyself, nor reckonest on aught
Thou hast not seen ; nor was thy lot by thee
Self-chosen.

What ! was then mine own by me
Desired? Nay ! by these woeful tears, congealed,
These rarest of all pearls, which here I hold,
I chose it not ; for Diophantus sold
Himself to crimes for power, and forced me thus
To barter my own soul for vengeance. Now
The time is near at hand, and on my brow
I feel the cold drops stand, wrung from within
By agony and longing. Whence do come
These hungry thoughts? this thirst for life? For some
Loved hand to touch me I would give — ah me !
I have but worthless gold and misery ;
I can give nought. Or if I might but see
My mother's eyes, or in this darkness hear
My father's voice. In vain they wait for me,
And I must meet my fate alone, and die.
Love, Life, have been denied me, and I cry
In vain. Only that bitter thing, Revenge,
Is granted me. That will I take ; and thou,
O Diophantus, who hast been my curse,
Shalt know its bitterness. I have thee now
Within my power. The wrong thou didst to me

And to my father's house, shall be avenged.
For this I die forever. The decree
Is passed."

Thus speaking she a moment bent
Her head, as to a power beyond herself.
The sun had gone, but far away, he sent
A softened light upon her, smoothly blent
With cool, gray, evening shadows. Once again
She clasped the pearls about her neck, and then
Upon the pavement kneeling, round the tree
She twined her two fair arms, and pressed her cheek
On its rough bark, and softly asked,

"In thee

Hast thou a beating thing that would be free,
Forever struggling with its prison walls?
If such thou hast, it is thy spirit. Hear
My words; and feel my hurrying heart-beats throb
Against thee; thus my spirit calls, while near
Draws death with cold, damp hand to quench its flame
Forever. Thus unreasoning, did I rob
Myself of light, and choose blind darkness. Name!
I have none. From the hour my work is done,

Iona is no more.

Drop down your silent dew upon my head.

Weep with me. Almost from my birth

Do I remember thee ;
Thy great protecting arms above me spread,
I loved in childhood. While my tasks I said,
I looked up to thee, wondering at thy strength.

Hear now my secret ; for at length
My goal is almost reached, and all shall be
Avenged. I loved this Diophantus ; yea !
With love unquenchable : yet will I smite.
Weep with me. Pity me. I will not fight

With Fate,

Nor tear myself to lift this weight
That presseth on me. All too late ! too late
Hath come repentance of my own rash will.
I will regird myself with hatred, strike
With strength that cometh of despair. Alike, —
To one who liveth not beyond the grave,

Are love, and hate.”

Thus torn with that which makes humanity
Most Godlike, she arose, and once more paced
The court, then sought her chamber. Sleep effaced
The marks of anguish, and her face but grew
More beautiful each day, — that swiftly flew
As all days pass, — and ever came the king,
Forgetting all delights save one, the joy
Her presence gave ; and at her feet would sing

Of pleasures past, and say they were but woes,
Compared with joy which filled his heart at sight
Of her. At last spake Leros.

“All is right.

The nobles ask for Hylax, and the hour
Is nigh. The king knows naught but thee,
And thy fair face. When next unto thy bower
He comes, I will send armed men to seize
And bear him hence, no longer king, but slave.”
She answered,

“Let them come, but leave, I crave,
To me his doom ; nor let them *dare* draw near
Until my word is given. Here
Within this court, on yonder marble seat,
Alone, I wait the king. Call Hylax ; meet
My nobles ; stay without until I send
For thee ; then come and bear him forth. The end
Is here, and I would be alone.”

Then Leros bowed before her, kissed her hand,
And left her. All that day
She watched the fountain play
With dreamy eyes,
Or lifted toward the skies
Her face, as she would pray
With trembling lips ; yet spake not. Far away

She heard birds sing of summer loves,
And high above her head the circling doves

Whirred past her, choosing each his mate.
Scarce heeding, once she sighed, watched them, and sighed
Again. That moment came the king; as late,
With hurried step he came, and heard the sigh,
And spake.

“Thou, fairer than all blossoms, why
Art sad? The sunbeams laugh to touch thee. Red
They kiss thy cheek. For thy fair head
I bring this lilied crown, of gold
And silver woven, and rare gems. Behold,
I had it wrought for thee.” She turned,
All passion laid asleep within her, took
The bauble in her two white hands, and smiled,
And said within herself, “He who forsook
Iona’s love, tries thus to win the heart
She gave a beggar. Now is he beguiled
In turn. ’Tis just; and I will test his love,
And learn if ever yet remorse hath touched
His heart.”

“Why lavish gifts on me? Above
All others Diophantus stands,” — she said —
“A nation at his feet; upon his head
A crown. Thy star of destiny,

Points it no higher than to me,
 A woman all to thee unknown?"
 He answered her, "For thee alone
 Lives Diophantus, and his crown
 Is less to him, than from thy lips, one smile.
 Sit near me. Turn to me. Nay! lift thine eyes
 To meet my own; and say, *I love thee*, while
 I drink thy words. Thy voice is music breathed
 Into my soul. Thy touch delight."
 She turned to him a moment, gazing deep
 Into his eyes, as she would read aright
 His inmost thought; and moved her lips, yet spake
 No word. So near were they to his, to slake
 His thirst for her dear love, he would have placed
 His own upon them; kissed them; thus to taste
 Their sweetness; drawing on him thus the curse
 That slept between them; but in haste
 She turned away.
 The sun declining sent his level ray
 In mellow light upon them. Looking down
 She saw upon her lap the jewelled crown
 Flash back a thousand lights. Her two hands clasped
 It listlessly, and dreamily she spake,
 "Dost thou in truth then love me? Do I wake
 To hear again those words that once were sweet
 To me?"

With sudden rage at this, uprose
The king, caught from her hands, and at his feet
Dashed down the costly gift, and trampled it.

And cried, "What then? Didst thou not say
In thy soft tones but yesterday
'I never loved another than thyself'?
And now thou sayest, 'Again I hear these words?'
Who hath dared utter thoughts of love to thee?
Thus will I trample him. Yea! pierce with swords
Of flame his heart, and drive him from the earth."
She answered,

"Peace. The words of which I spake
Were thine alone. Yea! even from my birth,
No man hath spoken words of love to me,
Save only thee.

Thus art thou of thyself, thy rival. See
How thou hast crushed the toy, in thy blind rage."
"Thou callest it a *toy*?" he answered her.

"Thy plaything, yea. Thus saith the sage,
'Kings play with crowns, and women's hearts,'
And thus beneath their feet they cast them down
When they are weary of them, or would have
Some new delight, or else are angered. Frown
Thou not. Behold! how thus thou hast disturbed
Thy peace, and mine."

“Think no more of it ; most divine,
 Most beautiful, I love thee ; nor would pain
 Thy gentle spirit, not for all the crowns
 Or all the jewels the wide world doth hold.
 Speak not again, I pray thee, slightly
 Of kings, since one would die for thee. Behold
 How great his love for thee, who still doth love
 And worship unrewarded. Thou art cold
 And far from me. Lean to me. Let me feel
 Thy hand touch mine, thy soft breath on my cheek.

Why dost thou turn away,
 And move thy lips to speak,

Yet no word say
 Of love, or gentle rapture? I would see
 Thy being thrill, as mine, with the sweet pain
 Of love. Now doth the warm blood mantle all
 Thy face and neck. Is it for love of me

It comes, and goes,
 Leaving thee pale as mountain snows,
 And far more cold?

The flaming sun with glory doth efface
 All lesser lights, that shine when he is gone
 With brightness borrowed from his smile ; such place
 Within us holdeth love, that all delights

Are quenched, or do but sickly shine

When love departs. Such love is mine
For thee. Those pearls that coldly twine
About thy neck are charmed, and hold from me
Thy heart. Unclasp them! cast them by! and wear
Those jewels which the sun hath kissed
To warmer glow; or else wear none. Too fair
Art thou for gems, that are not missed
But by the greater charm revealed
When they are gone."

Slowly she raised her arm,
Unclasped the pearls, and dropped them in her lap,
Then twined them with her fingers in and out
And around her slender wrist, and said,

"What charm
Is there in woman's tears? Salt drops are they,
That tremble on an eyelash and then fall
Unheeded to the earth, and pass away,
Followed by others of their kind
In dismal chase.
I have a tale of these, which I will tell,
As once thou asked of me, if still thou find
A wish for it."

"Dear heart! as it may please
Thyself," he cried. "I ever love to hear
Thy voice—would it might say 'I love thee,'—still,

If not, tell me the tale, and turn thy face
That I may look into thine eyes, so clear,
So wondrous, heavenly, soft, and blue. To chase
One pleasure with another, pray thee place
Thy hand on mine. Thus may I have three joys
In one ; to look upon thee, hear thy voice,
And feel thy gentle touch with sweet delight
Thrill all my being."

Then she looked on him,
Put forth her hand to him, and spake.

"Aright

I know the tale, and yet none told it me ;
And when I think upon it, it doth seem
No more reality, but some strange dream
That came to me, when in charmed sleep I lay
In fair Artemis' halls. Yet do I know
'Tis true. There lived a maid upon a hill
That overlooked the sea. I will not say
That she was fair,—not all are beautiful.
Her father was a king ; and she was reared
Most carefully, and grew most dutiful.
Around her father's palace of white stone
Was spread a city, vast, and walled about
With towered walls, even as is thine own.

And while she still was young,

Her parents died, and she was left alone
Queen-regent, till her brothers came of age,
Who were of tender years ; and songs were sung
In praise of her : for, though they were bereft
Of their great warrior-king, the people loved
Her. In all peaceful arts she led, and left
The path of war untried ; preferring thus
The gentler strife which man must wage for bread
With nature, to the hateful din of dread .
Destroying armies : hence in all her land
The swords were sheathed, and each man turned his hand
To gather in the harvests, for the earth
Brought forth abundantly, and drought and dearth
And frosts and devastating blasts, and all
That harmeth man, the Gods withheld. The call
Of trumpets sounding for the strife was heard
No more ; but shepherds' pipes and herdsmen's songs
Made music in the vales, and from the hills
Re-echoed children's laughter ; while the throngs
Who led the sacrifice, and bore the gay
Wreathed garlands for the feasts, sang of their queen ;
And when she walked among them, all her way
The maidens strewed with flowers. Her gentle mien
They loved, for she was gracious, and most kind
To all, and they were dear to her. Their griefs

Were hers, their joys she shared. Peace reigned. The blind,
The aged and infirm, were housed and fed,

And women's hearts were glad.

Suitors she had, and many, from all lands ;

Princes and noblemen, their hands

With gifts and treasures laden, seeking thus

To buy a maiden's heart : but she loved not,

And sent them whence they came, saying,

‘ My lot

Is joy to me, and till my heart be touched

To love, I will not wed.’ Across the sea

At last one came, with many goodly ships

And costly gifts, and smooth words on his lips,

A king in his own right ; and all well pleased

Her counsellors besought her to appear

And grant his suit. He, when she would not, seized

His sword, and swore by it that she should bend

As grass beneath his feet : but not by fear

Could her proud heart be conquered ; and again

The Gods were kind, and sent great winds to rend

And beat his ships, that all were lost. But one

Of all his host was saved, and he

Was like a God, so strong and beautiful,

With clustering, golden locks, most fair to see ;

Who lay upon the sands as he were dead,

Still clinging to his lyre, and on his head
A wreath of myrtle such as poets wear.
The gentle maiden-queen beheld him there
While with her maids she paced the sands ; with care
Had him conveyed into the palace : then
For many days she nursed him tenderly,
With her own hands performed each gentle deed
That gave him back his life, until again
He knew himself, and looked on her with eyes

Of love that followed where she moved.

O king ! and can I tell thee how she loved
This nameless man, who empty-handed came ?
And how she gave him that which none could buy,
Nor threats nor fear could wrest from her ? How tame
My words, alas ! with which I tell the tale !
She loved him. King, thou knowest but the name
Of love. Man reacheth out his arms to take,
And saith 'I love,' while woman giveth all.
And thus she loved, and bowed her for his sake,
Put forth her hand and led him to her throne ;
And he, because she was not fair, beguiled
Her with smooth words, while looking oft on one
More beautiful."

At this up rose the king,
Paced twice the court, then turned on her and spake,—

“Who told this tale to thee? I pray thee take
Those jewels from my sight, nor longer wring
Thy heart and mine with woeful words.”
She answered him,

“I slept a charmed sleep.
Mayhap the tale was told me by the birds
That circled round the bower wherein I lay,
For when I woke, this story dwelt within
My bosom. Now, I pray,
Bid me not cast these pearls away.
I love them for the sake of her who gave
And bade me wear them. See how pure their light.

A Goddess beautiful and bright
Bestowed them on me. I could read aright
Their meaning to thee, if thou wouldst but hear.”
Then breathed the king again, and drawing near
He stooped and kissed her two white hands, while she
Spake on.

“They are the tears of her, the queen
I told thee of, which falling on charmed ground,
Remained congealed. Behold how bright the sheen
Of light which they reflect! While thus between
My hands I hold these shining drops, they speak
To me, — ‘Trust no man’s words too far, nor seek
Perfection in the hand that holdeth thine,

Nor perfect bliss in human love. As she
Who wept these tears, most basely was betrayed
By him she loved, so drink thou not the wine
Of love, but keep thy spirit stayed
On calm delights, lest all thy joys be turned
To ashes, and thine eyes be dimmed
With tears of gall.'"
Then spake the king,

"No more.

Thy words have burned,
Each one a tongue of flame, within my heart.
Those pearls are charmed, I tell thee; and apart
They hold thy heart from mine.

Oh! most Divine,
Most beautiful and pure,
Let me one instant hold thee in mine arms.

I would but know if sure
Thou hast a heart, that beateth like mine own
Which clamoreth for thee unceasingly.

These charms
And worthless tears, cast by, and come to me.
No love like mine hath ever been. Alarms
Are needless, since I live but by thy breath.
Give heed! look in mine eyes for truth! for death
Were sweet to me this moment, if thou wouldst

But let me feel thy throbbing heart, or couldst
 But place thy lips on mine, and give one kiss
 With freight of love. So great the bliss
 To me, of this I ask,
 And yet to thee, so small the task.
 So dear thou art, so near — but lean to me
 And turn thy head
 But half about, and thy two lips, rose red,
 Touch mine."

 With tumult blinded, she nor spake
 Nor moved, until she felt his warm quick breath
 Upon her cheek, as he would even take
 From her the curse, ungiven.

 "To my death" —
 She cried, — "thou urgest me, and to thine own
 Most miserable undoing."

 Then she placed
 Her two hands on his breast, and held him back
 And gazed into his face, and spake.

 "A throne
 Thou hast, O Diophantus! and a crown,
 And both befit thee well, for thou art strong,
 And beautiful, and mighty. Yea! the throng
 Hold out their hands to thee with pride, and cry,
 'Great Diophantus is our king, and by

The will of Zeus he reigneth.' Oh, thou false !
Thou perjured one !" and with these words she thrust
Him off, gathering her white robe round her.

" Trust

Thy words ? Thou, who most basely hast deceived
With thy smooth tongue ? Thou harbinger of lies,
Who sittest on a throne usurped, believed
Of many ! By the Gods who see unseen
Thy crimes are known, nor longer canst thou screen
Thyself, who, self condemned, dost cower and shrink
Away from me, thy lawful wife. Behold !
Iona speaks to thee, who thus transformed
And by the Gods upheld, brings vengeance. Drink
Thou of the cup thyself hast filled. Thou ! bold
In crimes, yet weak in thine undoing.

The God of waters rescued me,
The God of thunders stooped to hear my prayers,
And Hera on my lips hath placed for thee
A curse. O Diophantus, whom I loved !"

Then bowed the king before her, and his eyes
A moment covered with his hands, nor moved
Nor lifted up his head. Then did he rise,
Hold out his arms to her, and speak.

" At last !

O Love ! At last I know the voice that still
 Would haunt me through thy words. Let be what will
 Thy curse. Strike ! Smite ! Spare not ! My light ! My love !
 I ask of thee no mercy. To remove
 One jot thou hast in store for me, I ask
 It not, who richly do deserve of thee
 But death ; who have so wronged thee. Yet I crave
 One boon. I pray thee, let me save
 Out of my life, one moment for the pure,
 Sweet rapture of my love for thee. To hold
 Thee in these arms, look in thine eyes, and kiss
 Thy fair white brow, thy neck, thy lips, and call
 Thee once more mine. One little instant fold
 Thine arms around me. Let me feel
 Thee breathe once more the words, ' I love thee,' with
 Thy lips on mine, then deal
 The curse the Gods have sent me."

 Swift she moved,
 Reached out as she would grant his prayer,
 Then suddenly recoiling turned, and where
 The fountain plashed, cast in the pearls, and cried,
 " Away with tears,
 And with remembered anguish ! All the years
 Since first we loved, and thou wert false, I cast
 Them by, with these." Then stooping to the ground

She folded in her arms the little hound
That ever followed Diophantus' steps,
And kissed it, crying, "Thus I fling away
The curse was meant for thee."

And from her arms
A serpent gold and green, to shun the light of day,
And eye of man, with slow and sinuous glide,
Slipped smoothly down, and crawling, sought to hide
Itself among the loose and broken stones.
With horror gazed the king, and loathing. Groans
Escaped his lips. He cried,

"Thou sorceress !"

But she spake on.

"The curse hath passed from me.
O Diophantus, whom I loved ! Thy deeds
Were hateful to me ; but thyself, yea ! thee
I could not hate ; and now my spirit bleeds
In anguish for the little beast, who thus
Hath borne thy punishment. My lips are free,
My arms may fold thee now.
For death draws near. Cold is my brow.
My hands are chill."

Then to her side
Sprang Diophantus, caught
And held her to his breast, while the rich tide

Of life swept back and flushed her face, and still
She spake.

“Give thou to Ion’s son
That thou hast wronged him of, and thou art free
From other woe.” He answered,

“Nay, all ill
Is mine, if thou depart. Henceforth, for thee
I live, alone.

For what is crown or throne
To him whom thou hast conquered? Who hath been
Uplifted to the heights of thy pure love?
Or looked into thine eyes, and read therein
Pity divine, all-conquering love, that lives
Through wrong? Oh! beautiful, sweet life, live on!
And let my love for thee in part atone
The wrong I did thee. Oh! my life, my light!”
She answered him,

“No more forever. Night
Draws near. The night of death, that hath for me
No dawn beyond the grave. Thou shalt not see
Iona. Nay! nor here, nor there. Thou hast
These moments, with their rapturous pain, while fast
Thy heart-beats mark their flight, and then to all
Which thou so close to thy warm breast dost hold,
Must thou forever bid farewell. No call

May reach me ; for with sorrow crazed, I sold
My life for that which I but now flung by.
For that wherewith to curse thee. O ! my love !”
But even while she spake, with her last cry
Despairing, heard they voices from above
That nearer, nearer drew, with joyful sound.
And lo ! beside them Iris stood. Around
Grouped bright immortals, like to stars. With light
They filled the court. So wonderful the sight
The waiting throng without brake in the doors,
And awed, in silence stood, with bated breath,
While Iris spake,

“I bring reprieve from death.

Iona, thou within thy soul dost hold

Such attributes divine

As die not, making thee immortal. Thine
The love that lives through wrongs ; and still, behold !
Through sore temptations conquereth,
Yea, even thine own self. Thy pity strong,
That overruleth all revenge, doth lead
Thee stainless to the grave. The throng
Of glorious beings round thee, wait to bear
Thy spirit hence, for thus hath Zeus decreed,

That thou henceforth shalt wear

A semblance like to ours.”

Then passed

Unseen Iona's spirit, and behold
 Among the white-robed throng appeared one more,
 As fair and bright as they ; while fold on fold
 Their glittering garments wrapped them round, and bore
 Them slowly upward, as within a cloud
 Of fleecy, floating raiment, and aloud
 Their voices brake in song. The dropping notes

Filled all the air

With melody ne'er heard before, that rare,
 And sweet, and wonderful, fled upward, far
 Into the blue of heaven, and died.

Then Diophantus, heeding not the crowd
 That waited round the door, nor seeing them,
 Laid down his burden beautiful, and bowed
 Above her. Once again he kissed her brow,

Her lips, her closed eyes, and her cold
 White hands. Then drew his sword, and crying,

“ Now

And thus let me atone the grievous wrong
 I did thee,” leaned on it, and died. The throng
 In haste pressed forward, then in awe drew back.
 None spake. At last they gently bore them forth
 And laid them in the palace, there to wait

Their burial.

Above the grave wherein Iona lay,
Grew three tall iris-flowers. One gold, and one
A royal purple, and the third pure white;
And these they carved upon her tomb.

I heard
No more. The last rays of the dropping sun
Were hid behind the western hill;
The heavy dews on every grass-blade hung
Like tears; the stream was still.







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